

KS VARNALATA

SCENES FROM HINDU VILLAGE LIFE IN BENGAL

BY

THE LATE DR. T. N. (GANGULI)

TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH

BY

D. C. ROY

WITH A PREFACE

BY

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Revised and improved

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I
DEDICATE
THIS TRANSLATION

BY PERMISSION

WITH MUCH RESPECT

TO

T. INGLIS Esq. I. C. S.

PREFACE.

I am very glad to hear that a second edition of Babu Dākshina Charan Roy's translation of the Bengali novel, *Svarnalata*, is about to be published. I am not surprised to find that the book has proved a success. The picture which it gives of Bengali village life is obviously faithful and correct. The author does not extenuate the faults of his countrymen and countrywomen; but he has an eye for their good qualities also. One cannot help feeling that if Pramada and Gadadhar have their counterparts in many a Bengali village, the self-sacrifice of the maid-servant, Syama, perhaps the most interesting character in the book, is no merely ideal picture.

The novel may be an importation from Europe, but it is now thoroughly domesticated in Bengal. One may fairly assume

that Bengali novelists, writing as they do for the Bengali public in the first place, have every inducement to describe things pretty much as they are, and that ought to enhance the value of their works in the eyes of the ever widening circle of Englishmen, who take an intelligent interest in India. But many Englishmen of this class are, of course, unacquainted with Bengali. It is to such readers that the present translation appeals, and has apparently appealed successfully.

To me Svarnalata, apart from its value as a description of Bengali manners, seems to contain a fair allowance of quiet humour and good-natured satire. The fact that a second edition of the English translation has become necessary shows that it possesses the highest of literary merits, the power to secure general appreciation.

CHARLES H. TAWNEY.

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SVARNALATA

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

SHASHIBHUSHAN and BIDHUBHUSHAN were two brothers born and brought up in a village near Krishnagar. In their infancy they were left orphans by the death of their father ; and Bidhubhushan, the younger of the two, being but a year and a half old when that sad event happened, had become the pet of his mother. When Shashibhushan, who was his brother's senior by seven or eight years, went to *pathshala*, Bidhubhushan was a mere baby.

Besides being older, Shashibhushan was more intelligent than his younger brother. In his seventeenth year he had completed his *pathshala* career, and was thought to be lucky enough to get a post with salary

Rs. 5/- per mensem under the Zamindar of the village. In his time in the service of a big Zamindar such indeed were the prospects of gain that the question of pay was of no consequence. Shashibhushan fared so well that in the course of a few years he became a substantial man in the village.

By the time Shashibhushan had completed his *pathshala* career, Bidhubhushan had just begun his. But he had been so petted and spoiled that he became a most idle and careless boy. He loved to be often after whatever would please or amuse him much, and was so unwilling to learn that he had always to be dragged to his lessons. Kind words had no effect on him; and harsh treatment, far from doing any good, could only make him go deeper in the way he was not to go. When at last he gave up going to *pathshala*, he was a great dunce fit scarcely for anything in the world. But

in Bidhu's time, in the marriage of a *kulin* Brahmin, the question of literate or illiterate did not matter at all. Bidhu was married in his fifteenth year. With 'his marriage he bade adieu to learning.

Bidhu's mother lived five years after his marriage. During this period nothing worthy of note happened except that the brothers had children born to them. Shashibhushan got a son and a daughter, and Bidhubhushan only a son.

CHAPTER II

A MANIHARI

WE must tell the reader at the outset that after the death of the mother of Shashi and Bidhu, four or five years had elapsed, and the children had grown well, their ages varying between five and seven. They now ran about and chased one another and played games. They walked sometimes with their servant to the bazaar, and quarrelled occasionally with other children.

So long as their mother was alive, the brothers were knit together by love and kindness. Bidhu knew not envy, and his elder brother was very gentle in his conduct towards him. After the death of their mother, however, Shashibhushan's wife endeavoured at times to make her husband understand that economy considered it was no longer advisable to live

jointly with his brother. But Shashibhushan, it seemed, was not one to do anything hastily. Were they not, born of the same parents? Were they not nursed and suckled by the same mother? They might quarrel and even separate, but nothing could extinguish their natural affection for each other. The case, however, with their wives was different. They had no sisterly love for each other, and often quarrelled. Notwithstanding, there was a great contrast between them. While the one was gentle and submissive, the other was rude and insolent. While the one wanted to avoid scenes, the other wanted to create scenes. The brothers, however, were neutral, and hence up to this time they were on perfectly good terms with each other.

While things thus went on with the brothers, there arrived one afternoon in their neighbourhood a *manihari* with his

old-fashioned trunk made of canework, full of fine things for sale. A *manihari*, in their time, was greatly welcome to all young people in a village, for it was not often he came out to them ; and when he did, it was only to make a short stay, and ~~be~~ to be off again. Now the sight of a ~~box~~ of fine things, such as looking-glasses, ear-rings, whistles, dolls, marbles, ~~and~~ exposed for sale on a large broad piece of cloth as to give them the appearance of a shop, brought the children, and the young as well as the elderly ladies together. Purchasers were not wanting among them. Some thought the prices too high, and with one after another. The children wanted toys. Such as got what they wanted jumped about for joy. There were others crying because they did not have what they wanted. Pramada, Shashibhushan's wife, bought whistles for her son and daughter. She

of course did not buy one for Bidhu's son. Sarala, wife of Bidhu, was present there, but as she happened not to have a single pice in hand, she turned to return home. Her boy, however, met her half-way. He saw her at a distance, and came running up to her.

"What have they got there, ma?" inquired Gopal. "Let us go and see."

"We must not go there, my child," said Sarala. "They are quarrelling there; they will beat us, if we go near them."

"How do they quarrel, ma? Who will beat us?" innocently asked the child.

"Come, love, we are not to stand here," said Sarala. "Let us go home as quickly as we can."

"I won't go home with you," said the child in a rather decided tone.

Sarala was in a fix. Pramada saw it all, and enjoyed the trouble her sister-in-law was in.

"What do you do here?" said Pramada to her children. "Go you, Bepin, and show your whistle to Gopal. Go you too, Kamini."

The children were off at their mother's bidding. They quickly joined Gopal, whistling and jumping merrily.

"Let me have a whistle, ma," said the boy, crying, seeing that his cousins had got whistles.

"The man, my dear," said Sarala, "hasn't got any more to-day. I will buy you one when he comes again to-morrow."

"To-morrow!" said the boy. "No, I will have one to-day."

Gopal was persistent and cried very much. What could she do? poor woman! She was compelled to go back and do what she could.

As they drew near, Gopal ran and got a whistle from the man, and went and joined his cousins again.

Sarala had not a single pice in hand, yet the price of the whistle must be paid. She was unhappy. She looked wretchedly about her, and fixed her eyes on Pramada. "Would you lend me a pice?" she said to Pramada.

Pramada was quick enough to hear at other times; but now, strangely enough, she could not hear Sarala. Sarala repeated her request, but still she pretended not to hear her. She ventured to address her sister-in-law a third time, and failed again to attract her notice.

"Can't you hear your sister-in-law?" cried one to Pramada. "Why don't you answer her?"

It was no use her pretending not to hear any longer. She turned reluctantly to her sister-in-law, and winking and eyeing her as if she had just got out of bed, said, "What?"

"Would you lend me a pice?" said Sarala again.

"Lend you a pice?" said Pramada.
"Why, I am no money lender."

"Then would you pay the price of that whistle, please?" said Sarala. "I haven't so much as a *cowri* in hand."

"I cannot look to everybody's wants," said Pramada. "I think I am not expected to give away all that I am worth in charity."

"My boy is the object of your love and affection, not of your charity," said Sarala rather bitterly. "Gopal is as much your own as Bepin and Kamini. He is your own if you but choose to think him your own."

"Thinking will not do," said Pramada. "It is no use thinking myself what I am not. It won't do to think myself a *rani*. I know I am a miserable wretched creature in the world, and it is no use trying to shut my eyes to this fact."

Sarala was struck dumb by her sister-in-law's pretty argument.

"There are strange characters in the world," Pramada went on saying to herself. "There is no pleasing them. I hate persons that are hard to please. I cannot bear the very sight of them. Have we not a good monthly income? And could we not have saved a good deal? But it is a pity that one must work and slave to feed the drones. Why, I know my husband is a great fool. If he had liked to be guided by me, without doubt he would have been able to make a fortune."

Pramada would have said more, but the thought of her husband being such a fool as he seemed to her was enough to make her cry. Indeed she wept like a girl to think that her husband was at best a fool.

There were some matronly ladies, whose selfish motives had led them to become admirers of Pramada. They often wanted to go to her for such things as salt, mustard-oil, &c., and on every such occasion

they failed not to make flattering remarks about her personal attractions and disposition, for instance, she was sweet-tempered, young and handsome, *'had beautiful eyes and a well-shaped nose, and such stuff and nonsense.* When these, therefore, found Pramada in tears, they affected deep concern at her grief. One of them could not help crying for the trouble of her young friend. And there were two, who even failed not to blame Sarala. There was one widow, a rather fat lady of short stature, who was particularly pungent in her remarks. She said that Sarala had no right to speak insolently to her sister-in-law, who was sweetness itself, for she must remember that her husband did not earn a pice, and was entirely dependent on his elder brother.

The remarks made by this last speaker, whose name was Digambari, had, it seemed, the greatest weight ; for all the elderly

ladies present there at once took the cue, and endorsing her opinion joined her in blaming Sarala. Beginning with Sarala they went on to criticise the character of every young woman in the village, and the conclusion they came to at last was that in the present age there was not one good girl, of course, with the exception of Pramada.

Poor Sarala ! she stood in the midst of her blustering critics a picture of utter helplessness. Her eyes were looking down and glistening with tears. But when, however, the *manihari* had got his sundries together and was ready to leave, Sarala was perfectly at a loss to know what to do, and was much afraid. She would have been glad to return the whistle if her boy had been by. The man, however, was going away without receiving the price of the whistle, when Digambari, the fat lady, of whom we have made mention, cried, "Hallo, man ! you forget

the price of that whistle." The man turned as he heard, and stopped. "Thank you, madam," he said, "I don't want the price of that whistle. 'It is a trifle. I can well spare a whistle for a boy."

This answer, however, did not give Sarala pleasure. She felt rather humiliated. The good fellow, perceiving that her pride was wounded, said again that as he wished to make a day or two's stay in the village, he might receive the price when he liked. Sarala liked this answer ; and she secretly blessed the man, for she thought he had a heart. When the man took his leave, Pramada was sorry, and her satellites, the elderly ladies, looked disappointed.

CHAPTER III

GOPAL AND HIS MOTHER

SLOWLY and pensively did Sarala retrace her steps homeward. She felt so miserable. On getting home she went to attend to her household work as usual. Then she retired to her room to brood over the event of the afternoon. Sarala truly loved her husband, but she was rather troubled in mind when she ever reflected upon the sort of idle thoughtless life he led. Bidhubhushan liked to stay away all day, and would not come home except to eat his meals. His time was spent in singing and playing at cards and dice. However, he had great regard for his elder brother. His education was nothing to speak of, though he might have been a very different man if he had been willing to learn when a boy. His chief fault was that he was sometimes badly out of temper, yet it must be said

that he was not easily moved to anger ; but once his passion was roused, it was not easily cooled.

Poor Sarala ! she felt more miserable this afternoon than she had ever done before. Should she say all that passed, to her husband ? She knew that it was no use. Yet she wanted to tell him all to relieve her mind. She hardly knew what to do, when her boy came and stood before her. Tears were in her eyes, but she wiped them quickly, for she did not want to be caught weeping by her boy.

"You are weeping, mamma ?" cried Gopal. He was rather surprised, for he had never found his mamma in tears before.

"No, I am not, my love," said Sarala rather hoarsely.

"Oh ! you are, mamma. There is a tear in your eye," exclaimed Gopal in a tone which was sufficiently expressive of pain.

And a tear did start now to her eye, for she was deeply moved by the childish words of her innocent darling.

"Oh, I am not feeling very well, I have gripes," said Sarala, trying to disguise her feelings.

"Then why don't you try the drug Syama gives me when I have gripes?" said Gopal with a look of great childish concern; "I will go and call her here."

"No, no, you need not go, my dear," she said.

But this excuse failing, she pretended to be troubled with a mote in her eye, which caused it to water.

"Then let me blow into your eye, mamma, it will do you good," said Gopal, drawing close to his mother.

"It is no use, my own dear, I shall be better presently," said Sarala, smiling through her tears and taking him affectionately into her arms.

Sarala hung over and gazed on her little darling's face with feelings of mingled love and sorrow. Tears glistened in her eyes. Gopal knew not why his mother wept ; but such is the influence of love that when he but saw his mother weep, his infant heart was touched, and a tear stood in his eye. This rather distressed his mother's heart. She wanted to forget her own sorrow, and walked out of the room and paced up and down with her precious burden on her breast. Gopal put his head on his mother's shoulder and kept quite still. Sarala wanted to divert his mind. She said funny things and laughed herself and tried to make him laugh.

CHAPTER IV

THE GOLD OJANDRAHAR

CHILDREN are apt to imitate the faults of their parents, but they seldom imitate their good qualities. A worthy father has rarely a worthy son ; but a bad father is almost sure to have a bad son.

Pramada's father was named Ram Dev Chakravarti. This gentleman lived a mile away from Shashibhushan's house. Envy, malice, and a disposition to quarrel, were the chief characteristics of his family. A daughter of his family, after her marriage, was sure to sow the seed of dissension in the family of her husband. Pramada had the faults of her parents. Her father was a frank and open-hearted man ; but of this or of any good feature of his character she had none. After her marriage she learned to care more for money than for anything

else in the world. When, however, her mother-in-law had been dead, and she was, properly speaking, the mistress of the house, she was a haughty, wicked, malicious woman who took great pleasure in wounding the feelings of her sister-in-law.

As we have already observed, Bidhubhushan had no useful employment to engage his mind in, and he led a sort of idle life, for which Pramada made his wife pay dearly by making her work all day. Though Sarala worked continually, she never uttered a word of complaint. Besides her regularly doing the cooking, she had to be busy the whole day, doing this, that, and the other thing. "I wouldn't mind working twice as hard if my health permitted," Pramada would say to any one, who might venture to remark by way of intercession that her sister-in-law had scarcely a 'moment's rest in the family.

She complained of her 'wretched health' as she called it, and not infrequently hinted that a little bodily exertion was sure to aggravate her complaint, though what her complaint was nobody ever heard or knew. However, as she was never known to take any medicine or to abstain, even for half a day, from her usual food, and besides as there was not one symptom present to lead to the diagnosis of her disease ; and as she never felt the least inconvenience, but on the contrary seemed to keep excellent health, it was difficult to know what was really her complaint. Yet it must be said that her complaint, whatever it might be, did inconvenience her at times, and it was only when her meal was not ready, and she had to wait beyond the usual time.

Now after the scene described in the preceding pages, Pramada went home with a look that made it clear to all who

came in her way that she meant some mischief. Entering her room she shut the door with a bang, bolted it, and then went and lay down in bed. The women, who were then in the house, significantly eyed each other as much as to say, "Something unpleasant is going to come off."

Pramada had such a way of answering queries that no one relished the idea of asking her anything.

Here was Bepin just now returned from *pathshala*. He walked up to his mother's room, but finding the door shut, he was off again to play. Kamini wanted to come to her mother. She stood crying at the door. Poor child! her mamma was not to open the door to her, though she might stand there and cry her eyes out.

The servants in a family, as a rule, have always the greatest regard for their master or mistress, whose favour they want to gain. The case, however, in Shashi-

bhushan's house was different. Syama had a greater regard for Sarala than she had for her mistress. Indeed she loved her, and deeply felt for her. Sarala had as much sympathy for Syama, and her chief satisfaction was to talk to her. The reason was they were both treated with unkindness ; and having equal griefs they learned to sympathise with each other, and thus there arose a friendship between them. Syama could not hear her mistress speak an unkind word to Sarala without feeling as though she would burst into tears. It was just so with her friend. Syama called Sarala *kakima*. One thing we must not omit to mention about her. She was fond of prying into the secrets of others. Even in broad daylight she would go listening at doors ; and she would tell Sarala all that she might thus stealthily pick up. They had no secrets from each other.

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Sarala gave Syama the details of the event of the afternoon. When she had heard all, she said with a smile, "It is all for a new ornament, I can tell you."

The sun was about to set. Knowing it was near time for her master to come home, Syama kept in readiness his slippers, his towel, and a *lota* of water as usual. She next went to put the *pūja* room in order. Sarala had many misgivings in her heart. Pramada lay in bed weeping and sobbing aloud. Tears fell plentifully from her eyes. Bepin was just returned from playing, and Kamini was crying again to go to her mother. While things thus stood, Shashibhushan returned home quite tired after a hard day's work.

Without stopping he stepped up to his room as usual, but finding the door shut, he began to knock at it. After knocking about a minute in vain, he loudly inquired, "Who is there in the room?" There was

no answer. He then turned to the maid-servant and said, "Where is your mistress, Syama?"

"In there," said Syama as she caught up a *kulsi*, pretending she was going to fetch water from the pond.

"Will you open the door or do you mean to keep me standing here?" cried Shashibhushan in a tone, which plainly showed that he did not mean to be disobeyed.

Pramada certainly did not mean to go farther than was prudent. She did not mean to offend her husband by overacting her part. Getting slowly on her legs, and assuming a look of profound grief, she went to open the door, and then returned and laid her down in bed again. Her eyes were red with weeping. Shashibhushan quickly guessed by her looks what she really meant; for such conduct on Pramada's part was not unusual. She

was fretful at times, and when she wanted to be so. She was fretful when she wanted, for instance, a costly *sari* or an ornament of the newest fashion. Her husband always sought to please her by letting her have what she wanted.

Shashibhushan went to his wife, and bending over her and smiling, as if to ask a favour, said, "What again?"

She made no answer. "What's the matter now?" he said again.

Silence still. He might as well have talked to the wall. He inquired a third time, but to no purpose. "The matter, it seems, is not a trifling one," he said to himself. He stepped up to the door, and putting his head out, cried, "Syama, Syama."

Nothing of Syama was to be seen; and Shashibhushan at last wanted patience and exclaimed, "What! will no one answer, and am I to be thus served in my own house?"

Pramada felt she must speak now. "What can you want with a poor wretched creature like myself?" she said in a tone that made her truly seem to act her part in a tragedy.

"Are you deaf? Couldn't you hear me?" he said rather angrily.

Pramada was offended. "What is it to you," she said, "whether I am deaf or not deaf? If you don't want me here, tell me so, and I would leave your house at once."

Shashibhushan had come home to rest after a hard day's work. He was now in no mood to put up with his wife's fretfulness. When, therefore, he heard her talk in that fashion, he could not but be angry and said, "You often talk of leaving my house; why don't you do so?"

"Why, do you mean to say," she said, "that my father is not able to support me?"

Pramada insinuated that her father was not unable to support her, although the fact was that he was extremely poor. He lived, as we have said, only a mile away, which enabled his daughter to see to his wants. Pramada privately supplied her father with rice, pulse, &c., from her own store room. This, however, was not unknown to Shashibhushan, though out of regard to his wife's sentiments, he connived at it. Now when his wife rather artfully hinted that her father was not too poor to support her, he was much amused and said, laughing, "Go and live with your father, my dear, if you like, but mind he must no longer expect to receive any help from this quarter."

This remark, although it was made in a quite facetious manner, and apparently without any intention to give offence, failed not to affect her most. A woman is quick to take to heart any insinuations

against her father or any one else of his family. Pramada necessarily took the remark jestingly made by her husband as a bitter sarcasm, and it so distressed and mortified her that she burst into tears afresh. She wept as though her heart would break. Shashibhushan now regretted his indiscretion. He certainly wished to tell her he was very sorry, and sit down by her side and try to comfort her, but as he felt that would only be adding fuel to the flame of her grief, he left the room in the hope that she would be herself again, when left alone for an hour or so. Not being able, however, to stay out long, he returned in a few minutes, and sitting quite close to her, said, "I am so sorry, my dear. Would you forgive and forget?"

Pramada only hung her head in silence.

Shashibhushan wanted to make her speak, and knowing what would act as a

charm in producing 'the desired effect, said, "I have this day given orders for your *chandrahar*. You have often asked about it, and now I think it will be ready in a few days. Of course I expected to have particular attentions paid to me this day ; but I shouldn't wonder at the sort of treatment I have received. It is just, I believe, as ill-luck would have it."

After a little pause Shashibhushan said again, "Bidhu told me one day there was no hurry for my giving orders for the *chandrahar*, but that I would do well to have the *baitakhana* 'finished first. I said, 'I am not going to leave the *baitakhana* half done, you may depend on that.'"

Pramada could no longer maintain her silence. The mention of the gold *chandrahar*, not to say how she was angry at Bidhu's being opposed to her husband giving orders for 'it, was inducement enough for her to speak.

"I am quite sick and tired of them," she said at last. "They are such a trouble to me."

"Who are a trouble to you?" asked Shashibhushan.

"What a question!" said Pramada.

"How can I understand you, unless you speak plainly. You said 'they.' Of course you didn't mean my brother alone. Who else is a trouble to you?"

"Who can it be but your precious sister-in-law? Every chance she can get to expose and insult me she takes. As for your precious brother, why, he is full of conceit; and he has the audacity to call you a fool among his friends as worthless as himself. My having an ornament will be the death of him. He cannot bear any good thing happening to you. And you call this brother of yours simple-minded. A very good simple-minded young man indeed, to call his own elder

brother a fool, a brother to whom he ought to be grateful for his fatherly care of himself and his family !”

“ Well, after all I should think Bidhu is a good man at bottom.”

“ I almost thought you would say that. You are quite ignorant of the ways of the world. However, I think you should be undeceived about your brother. You think he is simple-minded and well-meaning. No, he is not. He is full of cunning, and you are too good for the world—too simple to understand his artful ways. Why would he have the *baitakhana* finished first ? You will say, for the sake of his own comfort and convenience. Not at all. To be plain with you, it is because he has a special interest in it ; because, living jointly with you, he is legally entitled to a share in the *baitakhana*. He thinks of that. I can see it well enough, though *you* do not.”

Pramada had an indirect way of calling her husband a fool, not perhaps without reason. Shashibhushan had little or nothing of the shrewdness of his wife. He only understood accounts and learned to screw out money from the ryots. Now, however, he thought that his wife was right. "I see now," said he to himself, "why he wanted to have the *baitakhana* finished first. Giving one's wife ornaments is throwing away money he says. My wife's eye could quite see through his garb of simplicity."

"You are quite right, my love," said he to his wife, as though he could hardly keep his own thoughts to himself. "If I had known my brother's heart before, I would surely have rejected his proposal of having a *baitakhana*."

"You never asked my advice about it," said Pramada, now glad to find that her words had the desired effect on her hus-

band. "A man may be illiterate, and yet have a good heart. But it won't do to think your brother what he is not. He looks as meek as a lamb, but he is a wily fox, I can tell you."

"Hang the *baitakhana*. I will stop the building work and get done with it. Now about your sister-in-law."

"She is a precious woman, so sweet and gentle! Why, you will not find such another within twenty miles round. She talks big; she hates me, and she cares not a straw for you. This evening she picked a quarrel with me."

"What was the matter?"

"This evening a man came in our neighbourhood with toys and other fine things to sell. Bepin and Kamini wanted to have whistles. I happened not to have a single pice in hand. Our good neighbour Digambari, however, kindly lent me a couple of pice to buy whistles for my

children. Sister-in-law also wanted to buy a whistle for her boy. She went and got one from the man. But as she had nothing in hand, she turned to me and said, 'will you lend me a pice? I will pay it back with interest.' I said, 'you talk of interest to *me*! But I really do not know what interest may be charged on a pice.' Upon this, she said, 'you practise usury, you ought to know.' I said nothing, and she gave vent to her spleen in such a torrent of words that I only looked on with astonishment."

"Well, I should like to hear the words she used to you."

"I do not remember them. I am a plain sort of person, and do not much care to remember anything. Our friend Digambari, however, may remember all, for she was present on the spot. Shall I send for her to-morrow?"

"O yes, I should like to hear everything from her."

"I am about to ask you something," said Pramada ; "you must tell me the honest truth."

"What is it, my dear ?" said Shashibhushan.

"Have you truly given orders for the *chandrahar* ?" she said, smiling.

"Truly speaking, I haven't yet. But I tell you it will come true to-morrow. To-morrow morning I will send for the goldsmith and give him orders for the *chandrahar*. I shall think no more of the *baitakhana*. What a true friend I have in my brother !"

Pramada said nothing. She sat with downcast eye, evidently a little disappointed, and thinking of her *chandrahar*.

But where had Syama been all this time ? With her ear applied to the door she had been listening attentively to the

conversation of the husband and wife ; and she did not miss a word. She then went, as usual, to Sarala and told her all she had overheard. When Syama had finished, she said, "Didn't I guess aright what her fretfulness meant ?" .

"Yes, a new ornament," said Sarala, smiling. ॥

CHAPTER V

SARALA'S DISQUIETUDE

BIDHU did not come home on the night of Shashibhushan's conversation with his wife. There was a *jattrā* at a neighbour's house, and there he stayed the whole night. A wife is all dependence on her husband ; and Sarala wanted very much to see her lord to whom she had so much to say. When it was very late at night, and her husband did not appear, she rose to go to bed. She, however, could not get any sleep. She sat up in bed and thought that if she continued in that posture for some minutes, she might be inclined to sleep ; but still slumber came not to her. She was very impatient now, and thought she must send Syama to fetch her husband home. So she went and roused the maid-servant. "Syama, dear," she said

in a coaxing tone, "will you go and bring your master home?"

"I can't go now ; I don't know where to look for him," said Syama, yawning and rubbing her eyes.

"He is gone to the *jattrā*. I recollect now he told me he would go to it."

"I cannot go among the crowd, I tell you that plainly," said Syama evidently annoyed at her being disturbed in her rest.

"You make a lame excuse, Syama. Have you never gone among a crowd at a *jattrā* before?"—"Well, what, if I have? But I mustn't say anything." With this Syama bustled out of the house.

Now when Syama was off Sarala felt much relieved. She sat up for a time waiting and watching, and then tired laid her down to rest. It was no longer night, and the fresh soft breezes of the morning made her inclined to sleep.

Syama soon reached the house where the *jattrā* was going on, walked in and looked searchingly among the swarming crowds around, but her eyes failed to detect Bidhu. Loud cheers were given every now and then, and Syama unconsciously sat down to hear the *jattrā*. Her notice, however, was suddenly attracted to one who played on the *dhole*. Syama knew her master at a glance ; but she wondered what could have induced him thus to assist at the *jattrā*. She watched him for a time, but her eyes never met his ; so she directed her attention again to the *jattrā* and was soon deep in it.

Sarala was asleep. How sweet is sleep ! It makes us forget our cares and troubles. Sickness and sorrow, humiliation and disappointment, a hundred little things that chafe us in our daily domestic concerns in life, and distresses such as make life seem as a burden—these are all for-

gotten in sleep. But sometimes a wretched man seems to have no rest even in sleep. Troublesome dreams disturb him at night. Sleeping or waking, he seems incapable of rest.

Sarala was sleeping. Nestling at her breast was her darling in slumber. At her head and close by the window a lamp burned dimly. Her face was distinctly visible except when the light flickered. It was a pretty face, and it now looked charmingly pretty with small particles of sweat standing on her beautiful brow and shining like pearls in the dim light of the lamp. Her lip quivered a little. She looked pensive in sleep.

The sun looked in at the window of Sarala's room. She awoke as its golden rays kissed her eyes. She got up with a start and left the room, leading her boy by the hand.

CHAPTER VI

THAKRUNDIDI DIGAMBARI

THE reader must remember his old acquaintance Digambari, of whom we had occasion to speak before. We shall now try to give him a somewhat detailed account of her in this chapter. This lady lived within a stone's throw of Shashibhushan's house. She owned two huts, one used as a bed-room, and the other as a kitchen. The enclosed space or yard in front of her dwelling was very small, and at the back of it was a plot of ground with a few flowers, a cocoa palm and one or two other fruit trees in it, which she called her garden. The house was scrupulously kept clean, in which Digambari lived all by herself.

It will be rather difficult to describe her person and character. Let us briefly notice her complexion. The things readily

suggested by the look of her skin are ink, such as is used in the *Zamindari shresta*, the soot of the kitchen, tar and the like. She was a short stout woman, with only a few tufts of hair left here and there on her head, large teeth such as would remind one of radishes, red eyes and feet unusually broad and long, the toes in them standing considerably apart as though they had quarrelled and separated. Digambari was the pet of her father, and went with him wherever he went till she was eleven or twelve years of age. She was known to every one in the village. She was about forty; and the young people of the neighbourhood called her *thakrundidi*, and loved to cut jokes with her. She lost her husband shortly after her marriage, so that she had but a faint recollection of her wifhood. For once, after her becoming a widow, she went to her father-in-law's, but left it

for good after three or four days' stay, during which she did nothing but quarrel. Though a rather bold and meddlesome woman, which made her somewhat the dread of all good girls in the village, she was outwardly obliging, could speak flattering words on occasion, and gave a friendly reception to any one who went to see her at her house.

As Sarala left her room in the morning, as observed in the preceding chapter, she shrank back at the sight of Digambari and hastily went in again to avoid her. Digambari walked towards Pramada's room with her face turned away. Sarala came out presently and saw her enter Pramada's room.

A wall separated the rooms of the two sisters-in-law. Sarala re-entered her room and tried to overhear the conversation that followed ; but not being able to hear anything, she left the room and went to engage herself in her domestic work.

Digambari talked with Pramada for about an hour, and then went and called to Sarala.

Sarala's mind misgave her. She slowly approached the place, where Digambari was standing.

"I am so sorry," Digambari began at once as she fixed her naturally red eyes on Sarala, "I am about to tell you something that would grieve your heart. I have been requested to tell it to you; don't blame me."

She made many excuses, pretending she was very sorry on her account. She assured her she should have been the last person having anything to do with this business, but that she could not in any way avoid it.

Her introductory speech, such as it was, greatly frightened Sarala, and she said, "Tell me at once what is the matter and don't keep me in suspense please."

Digambari, looking as if she did not like the business at all, said, "I have been requested by your sister-in-law to tell you that she is going to separate from to-day. 'We have not pulled well together', she said, 'and certainly never can ; under the circumstances there is nothing better we can do than separate. There will be no more quarrels, and discontent and dissatisfaction, and you know there is nothing I dislike so much as an unquiet house.' These are the very words she wished me to say to you."

This was distressing to Sarala. "What will my husband think of me when he knows it?" thought Sarala to herself. "Perhaps he will think I have not been behaving as I ought." The thought she could not bear. She could bear insult and unkindness, as she had often done, without a murmur, but she could not bear the thought of her husband thinking her bad.

What she heard was a torment to her. Nothing had she dreaded in her imagination so much as that. She had trembled even at the very thought of it. Was she not all submission to her sister-in-law? Was it not her constant endeavour to please her in every possible way she could? Did she not work continually without ever looking to her own comfort in the family? Did she not know that it was her interest to keep in with her? She had always taken care so to conduct herself as to give her cruel and malicious sister-in-law no plea whatever to find fault with her. Yet in spite of all she was, and meant to be, to her, hers, it seemed, was the lot to suffer.

"Does my brother-in-law mean it?" asked Sārāla in a piteous tone. She felt as though her feelings would choke her.

Your brother-in-law is a quiet peaceful man," said Digambari. "He said to me

that he thought it would be far better to separate than have constant quarrels in the family."

"Oh ! what shall I do ?" said Sarala in great distress. "Will you not plead for us, my dear madam ? We shall be utterly helpless without him, and you know it."

"I am very sorry I can do nothing for you, my friend," said Digambari. "Your brother-in-law said to me just now, 'my dear madam, you know my wife is an invalid. Would you kindly look after our meals ? You know of course that we shall be put to great inconvenience if you will not oblige us by complying with my request'. Of course I cannot refuse them this favour. I like to serve people, and I am always ready to serve my neighbours."

Having communicated what she had been commissioned to communicate, Digambari moved towards the kitchen,

and Sarala, now feeling as if she was truly a forlorn creature in the world, was obliged to seek her own room.

In a little time Shashibhushan got ready for *kachari*. On leaving he told Digambari that his sister-in-law might make use of the cow-shed for preparing their meals, adding that he should try to find for them a better place the next day.

Now let us turn to Bidhubhushan. On the preceding day, after taking his meal, he left the house again, as usual. On returning to his friends he heard that the Mukerjees of their neighbourhood were going to have a *jattrā* at their house. The news was hailed by him. He loved music, and was fond of *jattras* and other amusements. He went to present himself at their house. On getting there he went at once to assist in making the necessary preparations. In a few minutes he was properly busy, and bustled about, now

doing this, now doing that ; sometimes he seriously consulted a friend, and at other times eagerly whispered something in one's ear, all the while seeming to have a most lively interest in his work.

The sun was about to go down, and Bidhu was full of glee. When it had quite turned to dusk, he left off and went home to have his supper. Supper was not ready, but he could not afford to wait for it. Much as his wife wanted him, he seemed in a tearing hurry, and went off again, saying to her only, "I am not going to wait for supper, I am going to the *jatra*."

On his return, however, Bidhu was painfully surprised to hear that the players had proposed to put off the play till the next night for the reason of one of the most important hands among them, the one who played on the *dhole*, being attacked with cholera. All preparations had been made. The play could not be conveniently

put off, yet it seemed there was no other alternative. While things thus stood, Bidhu offered voluntarily to supply the place, and his proposal was accepted all round with joy.

The *jattrā* commenced at the fixed time. The players, however, had their fears about Bidhu, lest his bad performance should mar the effect of the play and shame them. After two or three songs, however, they became impressed with such a high opinion of him that they discarded all fear as utterly useless, and felt greatly encouraged. Every one was pleased with the general performance of the play, and the gain of the players, in kind and coin, was much greater than they had expected.

After the *jattrā* was over, the players offered Bidhu a portion of what they had earned, but he generously refused to accept it.

As Bidhu was coming home, he met Syama on the way. Syama had sat out the play.

"Where have you been, Syama?"

"I have been to fetch you from the *jattrā*," said Syama.

"Why didn't you see me then?"

"There was such a thick press, and I was afraid to push my way through to go to you."

"Why, the men wouldn't eat you."

"How provoking! I didn't say they would."

Bidhu talked on pleasantly and freely cut jokes till they neared home, when Syama suddenly turned away from his path and was quickly gone.

CHAPTER VII

SEPARATION OF THE BROTHERS

SYAMA had been to call Bidhu, and she told him so, when he inquired, meeting her on the way, where she had been. Bidhu, however, thought that she was not serious. Indeed he thought that Syama had only been to hear the *jattrā*.

Bidhu reached the door of his house, and walked in, taking care not to make any noise. There was no one in the outer-house, and this struck him as rather strange. He walked into the inner parts, but he neither saw nor heard any one there. He went to look into the kitchen, expecting there to meet his wife. But finding Digambari instead very busy in cooking, whom he had least expected to meet, he was a little surprised and fell back a step or two ; but being inclined to be facetious he went and placed himself

before her in a ludicrous posture and said, "My sweet charmer, my owl of good luck, how very glad to meet you. To what good fortune do we owe this visit?"

Bidhu was accustomed to pay her such compliments; and Digambari always felt flattered and never took any offence.

Now, however, when Bidhu addressed her in such endearing terms, she looked very grave and said nothing.

"Why are you so cruel this morning, my dear madam? Why don't you say anything?"

Digambari was still silent and hung her head.

Bidhu was in uncommon good humour this morning, for his excellent performance in the *jattrā*. Standing before her with joined palms and an expression of mock submissiveness in his look, he said, "I am your most humble and obedient servant.

Do not torment me by persisting in your silence."

Digambari was as cold still. None of his jokes or nothing that he could say seemed likely to thaw her now. This seemed strange to Bidhu, and he was puzzled what to make of it. It struck him suddenly, however, that Syama had not really joked; and he now began to suspect some mishap in the family. He grew impatient and went at once to find his wife. Sarala was in her room and weeping. She was miserable. Sorrow and fear by turns* oppressed her heart. She was so afraid, when her husband knew all, he would blame her and scold her. Quickly, however, Bidhu was before her. He looked on her and was very much frightened to find her in tears. A minute ago he was so jolly and jocose, but now he looked as though he greatly feared to ask any question. • After some

moments, however, he inquired, "Where is Gopal?"

"Gopal is gone to '*pathshala*,'" replied Sarala, sighing.

"Bepin and Kamini?"

"Bepin also is gone to *pathshala*. Kamini may be about, playing."

"What makes you weep then?" inquired Bidhu, relieved considerably.

Brother-in-law is going to eat separately from to-day. He wants to separate."

These words Sarala uttered in a tone of deep dejection.

"Brother wants to separate!" said Bidhu in a tone, which showed that he thought it as something simply impossible. "I know my brother's heart; he is so very kind to me. He cannot mean it, I am sure he cannot."

"He sent *thakrundidi* Digambari to tell this to me," said Sarala. "When he left for *kachari*, he told her again that we

might prepare our meals in the cow-house for to-day, for he would find for us a more suitable place next day.”

“Well, what’s the reason of his wanting to separate?” asked Bidhu with a look of perfect unconcern, as if he could hardly bring himself to believe such a thing to be possible.

“I do not know ; I asked sister-in-law for the price of a whistle for Gopal,” said Sarala. And she told him all that had passed between her and her sister-in-law.

Bidhu laughed at this and said, “It is a trifling matter. Brother must be wholly ignorant of the truth of the matter or he would not talk of separating. However, it is easily mended. Come, cheer up, love, don’t be downhearted. I am sure things will be all right again, when brother comes home.”

“May Durga grant it !” said Sarala,

feeling considerably relieved to find her husband so confident.

"I want to bathe," said Bidhu. "I sat up all night last night and feel so dull. Bring me my towel, Sarala, and a little oil to put to my head."

Bidhu went off to bathe ; and Sarala, now much relieved, went to proffer her assistance to Digambari. Pramada, seeing her enter the kitchen, cried, "Syama, a particular person has no business in our kitchen, you understand of course."

Syama was not in. What did that matter ? Pramada never spoke to the person with whom she was offended, but if she wanted to say anything, addressed her remarks to Syama, whether Syama was in or no.

Touched by the cutting remark of her sister-in-law, Sarala immediately left the kitchen and returned to her room in some confusion.

Shortly afterwards Syama came in ; and finding Digambari very busy in cooking, she went to Sarala and said, laughing, "You have got release from your office, *kakima* ?"

Syama had always a smile on her lips and was ever jolly. When she put that question, laughing, Sarala was rather offended and gently reproved her, saying, "You are a silly girl not to know that it is not the time to laugh."

"Why," said Syama, "would you have me sit down and mope like an owl ?" Perceiving, however, a tear in Sarala's eye, she felt rather ashamed.

"Oh, Syama," said Sarala in a piteous tone, "brother-in-law has made up his mind to separate, and we are going to be helpless." And she told her why instead of herself she had found Digambari in the kitchen, and all that had been said by Shashibhushan.

Syama was extremely sorry. After a while, however, she said, laughing, "I really feel very thankful I am not my master's mother."

"Why, you laughing girl?" asked Sarala, smiling.

"Why, *kakima*, is not a mother to be very much pitied when her sons fall out and separate?"

Just as Syama said this, the children returned from *pathshala*. Gopal quickly appeared before his mother and said, "Let me have something to eat, mamma."

"Wait a little, my love," said Sarala, as she affectionately wiped the ink with which her boy had daubed his face. Pramada put a *sundes* into her boy's hand, and left the room as she said, "Now eat here ; mind you don't get out before you have finished." Repin, however, would do no such thing. As soon as his mother's

back was turned, he left the room and went and called to Gopal.

Gopal quickly joined his cousin, and seeing that he had got a *sundes* to eat, said, "Will you let me have a bit, cousin?"

"No, mamma will scold."

"Why should mamma scold? When I have anything to eat I always share it with you. My mamma doesn't say anything."

"I can't give you now, cousin; when I am a man I will."

"Why, I shall not always remain a child. When I am a man I shall not want anything from you."

Thus talking the children came near to the kitchen. Bepin looked round as if to see whether any one was watching, and then breaking off a small bit was going to give it to Gopal when Digambari, who observed him from the kitchen, cried, "Stop, Bepin, I see you; I will tell mamma."

"Tell what ? I haven't given him any of the sweetmeat," cried Bepin as he crammed the whole of the *sundes* into his little mouth.

Gopal looked sad and disappointed. He was just about to return to his mother when Syama presently coming up put a *sundes* into his hand. He looked very pleased. Eating it he went and joined his cousin again.

Bidhu quickly returned after bathing. Shortly after, at the usual time, Shashibhushan returned home to have his meal. Bidhu would not speak to him then, for he thought he was tired and had need of rest. Shashibhushan rested a while ; then he took his bath, after which he sat down to do his *puja*. He had just got done, when *Thakrundidi* Digambari announced that meal had been served up. He rose and went to dine. His custom was to call his younger brother when he

went to dine. For the first time that day he broke his custom. He went to dine alone and looked unusually grave. He went afterwards to take his nap as usual. As he sat reclining against a bolster, enjoying his *chilum* of tobacco and chewing *pan-supari*, Bidhu entered and quietly went and sat down at his feet, holding his head down and looking so sad. For three or four minutes he sat expecting to be spoken to ; then fairly tired of his brother's reticence he asked, "Are you really going to separate, brother ?"

"Why, yes," said Shashibhushan, "it is better we should separate than have constant bickerings in the family."

"It is a pity there should be any bickerings at all ; but whose fault is it ? Had you not better inquire first and know ?"

"I have heard all, or I wouldn't want to separate."

"What have you heard, pray ?"

“Why, yesterday a man came to sell toys ; and my wife borrowed a couple of pice from *thakrundi* Digambari to buy whistles for the children. Sister-in-law was standing by, and asked, meaning my wife, ‘will you lend me a pice ? I will pay you interest.’ Now, isn’t it bad to talk like that ?”

“Why, yes ; but——”

“Don’t interrupt me, you can have your say when I have done speaking. Well, my wife replied, ‘you talk of interest to me ! I really do not know what interest may be charged on ‘a pice.’ Upon that sister-in-law said, ‘why, you practise usury, you ought to know.’ What right has any one to talk like that, pray ? Is it for this that I ought to be kind ?”

He uttered his interrogations with such a sneer that Bidhu knew there was very little hope of reconciliation. Yet he said, “I tell you, what you have heard is not

true." And he told him all exactly as he had heard from Sarala.

"This, I tell you, is true," he said rather emphatically.

"Have you any witnesses to prove that it is true?"

"Witnesses !" exclaimed Bidhu. "Why, I haven't come to court. Yet I can call to witness one of the elderly women who were present."

"*Thakrundidi* Digambari was present. Her evidence shows that your version is not true."

"Does it?" said Bidhu in a rather sarcastic tone.

"Well, if you don't believe me, you can call her here and ask. She is in there."

"It is no use my asking her," said Bidhu after a brief pause. Then rising and laughing scornfully he said again, "Such a respectable person! why, of course what you have heard is all true,

since it comes from one whose veracity is not to be called in question !”

Bidhu had moved up to the door, and was just about to leave the room when his brother called him back and said, “I will give you a room for your kitchen. As to dividing between ourselves such movables and immovables as we possess, this should be done in the presence of our neighbours ; and I would want to have done with it as early as to-morrow.”

“Just as you please,” said Bidhu. “But why in the presence of our neighbours ? I shall not dispute with you, you know that. I shall be content to take what you may be pleased to give me.”

When he had said that, he left the room. Pramada had been silent all the while ; but just after her brother-in-law had left, she observed, “Such a haughty fellow ! Didn’t you mark his words ? He would not stoop to conciliate his elder brother.”

“Want will bring down his pride,” said Shashibhushan, stretching his full length and shutting his eyes. •

CHAPTER VIII
FORTUNE NEVER SMILES
STEADILY ON ONE

It was the month of *Pous*. The hour was noon. One might have met just at this time a weary traveller resting under the shade of a tree, if one had happened to be on the road near Hanskhali, which led from Krishnagar to Calcutta. Viewed at a distance the traveller looked about forty, but a closer inspection showed him to be ten or twelve years younger. Over his head could be detected one or two solitary gray hairs here and there. He looked care-worn and wretched. It was easy to see that it was his cares that made him look much older than his age. He had on a pair of shoes patched in six or seven places, all dusty, the dust covering his legs up to the knees. He wore a somewhat coarse country *dhuti* which did

not look clean ; a threadbare woollen shirt, from which the nap was worn off ; and over it, to complete his suit, he wore a coarse *chadur* which hung folded across his shoulder. Close by his side lay his bamboo stick, and his *huka* and *chilum* to refresh him on the way.

Bidhu had never dreamed of finding himself reduced to such a sad condition. Does the reader need to be told that it is he of whom we are speaking ? Yet I believe if he had seen him when he led a sort of easy idle life, without any care or concern, and looking perfectly happy in all around him, he would never have known him now to find him in such a pitiable condition, and with such striking changes in his appearance, after his separation from his brother.

So changed was he that he looked altogether a different man. That smile which was habitual to him, that sprightly-

ness of temper combined with such levity as was natural to his age, that attention which he loved to pay to his person and dress—all were now missed in him. Yet one thing he never lost, he lost not his integrity. In spite of his destitution he maintained his honesty of purpose, and preserved intact that simplicity which had marked him from a boy.

Leaning his head on his hand Bidhu sat there sorrowfully reflecting upon his past and his present condition. He had never been from home before. He looked around and felt like one abandoned to the wide wide world. What should he do? Where should he go? He had no fixed purpose or destination.

After his separation from his brother, as long as he was allowed credit Bidhu had been able to live pretty comfortably with his family. But after that he made shift to live by borrowing among friends.

This could not go on long, and he saw that he must sell his things in order that the family might not starve. At first went his wife's ornaments one after the other, then this, then that, till, when all the movables in the house were gone, and there was not a utensil left, he found himself reduced to a state in which he saw he must either beg or starve.

Bidhubhushan had to support in a family his wife, his little boy, and the maid-servant Syama. Since the separation of the brothers Syama had stuck by Sarala, and she never cared for her wages. One day Bidhu, wanting to change his clothes which were so dirty that he felt shame to go out in them, sent Syama for the washerman. In a little time the washerman appeared.

"Whose clothes are those, Ramdhan?" inquired Pramada, meeting the washerman at the door.

"Bidhu Babu's. I have brought his *dhuti* and his *chadur*."

"A worthless fellow. You call him a babu ! But what does he pay you ?"

"He is to pay at the rate of Rs. 5 a year ; but nearly ten months have passed and I have not been paid a *cowri*. I will urge him for my dues to-day. Now that the price of paddy is low, I would like to lay in some stock of it."

"I don't think you can get your dues in that way."

"What then do you advise me to do, madam ?"

"Will you follow my advice ?"

"I will."

"Well, keep his clothes and tell him you must have your dues first."

"He will be angry with me."

"Angry with you ! What do you care for his anger ? Do you think such a beggarly fellow as he can do any harm

to you? But look here, if you cannot get anything, see me when you go home; I may lend a rupee or two to help you."

Pramada's manner of talking, and the prospect of a loan from her gave him courage to follow her advice. He walked in, and finding Sarala alone, said, "Here I have brought Bidhu Babu's clothes, but I must have my dues first.">

"Ramdhan," said Sarala in an imploring tone, "will you not wait a little longer? We expect to get some money to-day. We may be able to pay you something to-morrow."

"I have waited long enough and can afford to wait no longer. I will take no refusal to-day."

"We have eaten nothing to-day. We haven't so much as a pice in hand."

The washerman eyed her *balas*. Thinking they were of gold he audaciously

remarked, "No one in want, I should suppose, has a right to wear gold ornaments."

Sarala was very much offended at this very bold remark. Her face reddened ; but she quickly checked herself and said, smiling, "What gold ornaments I had are all gone." Looking on her *balas* she said, "These are gilt." And so deep was her sense of humiliation that she hid her face in her *sari* and wept.

The washerman was much ashamed of himself for the offence he had given by his impudence. So leaving the clothes he quickly retreated, and would not see Pramada though she had held out hopes of a loan to him.

Immediately after the washerman had left Syama made her appearance.

"What are you at now, *kakima* ?" she cried.

"Hush !" said Sarala ; "don't make any

noise, Syama. Gopal is asleep, you will wake him."

"What does it matter if I do?"

"Are you out of your senses, Syama? Poor child! how he will feel his hunger if he wakes! It is so late, and he has had nothing to eat."

"See what I have got here," said Syama, as she produced from the folds of her cloth a few fruits and some sweet-meats.

"Where did you get these?" eagerly inquired Sarala, brightening up. And Syama only said, "Never mind where, *kakima*," and smiled.

Whenever it happened there was nothing to eat, and such a thing was not of rare occurrence, Syama would be sure to get some food for Gopal by doing some work or other for a neighbour. She thus sometimes earned provisions for her mistress also. But if ever she failed to get

anything, she would spend a few pice out of her own savings to buy something to eat for them.

Sarala was full of gratitude and said, "You are truly a mother to him, Syama."

Syama was deeply moved by her words. With tearful eyes they went and roused Gopal.

Bidhu put on his clean clothes, and leaving his home proceeded to the 'big house,' as it was called, of which the owner, the Zamindar of the village, had, on the previous day, very kindly offered to help him with some money. He got there in a few minutes, but as the gentleman had just then lain down to take a sleep, as usual, after eating his meal, the servants who were by would not comply with his request to mention his business to their master for fear of disturbing him.

"Rama," said Bidhu, stepping up to one of the servants, whom he knew by name,

"I haven't eaten any food to-day. Will you not go and tell this to your master?"

"O you are such a troublesome fellow. I tell you we cannot listen to you now."

But I haven't eaten anything, and am so hungry, my friend."

"Well, what's that to me? I know there are fellows who will pretend having eaten nothing, but who will be sure to go to the grog-shop if they can get a few pice."

"Do you dare to talk like that!" cried Bidhu in a passion.

"You are not to show your red eyes to me; I won't put up with it, I tell you. You can wait or go just as you like; but I tell you once for all you can't see master till he is up, and I will not bear to be bothered any more."

Bidhu was silenced by the insolent speech of the servant. Mortified he went and sat down on a stool hard by, while his eyes were nearly dimmed with tears.

The servants soon laid them down to sleep. They were more used to leisure than to work ; and like their master they wanted to take a sleep after meal.

Bidhu waited and waited till it was pretty near sunset, and then he grew impatient. The servants still lay wrapt in their peaceful slumber ; and some of them snored on their backs. Bidhu felt it was useless to wait any longer. Night came on, and he was just about to leave when he heard the voice of the master calling to Rama. He resumed his seat, thinking he would wait till the last.

The master was awake now, but Rama still slept. One of the other servants woke up with a start and hastened to give Rama a pull by the leg lest the master should want him.

"Please master," cried Rama, starting from his sleep and rubbing his eyes till they were very red, to shake off his drowsiness.

"Do you remember me, friend," entreated Bidhu as the servant moved to obey the summons of his master.

"O, you are still there!" exclaimed Rama, stopping short and looking askance at him.

"Well, to-day is Saturday. There will be company here to night," said the master, significantly eyeing the servant.

"There is that bottle of port," said Rama. "And sherry," pausing a little he said, "yes, only one bottle."

"One bottle of sherry! you surprise me. There ought to be three if I am not mistaken."

The master was right. There were three bottles of sherry, but Rama had drunk up two of them.

"That's why I wouldn't have the charge of it. You seem to forget that I took out five bottles of sherry when there was company here the other day."

“Five—bottles—of—sherry?”

“Yes, five, though one of your particular friends has discontinued his visits for fear his father would carry out his threat to make an example of him.”

“Who is that man there?” asked the master, glancing toward the *baitakhana*.

“I don’t know. He seems a beggar Brahmin. He says you kindly promised him some money.”

“Oh, that fellow. I met him yesterday. Tell him I am not well and cannot see him now.”

These words, spoken in such a careless manner as to be audible to Bidhu, made him immediately slink away.

As the rich gentleman had offered to help Bidhu of his own accord, he almost had felt sure of some pecuniary assistance from him. He was sadly disappointed; and now as he walked home not half so ill with hunger as with the thought of his

dear wife and child, he said, "Such hypocrites are these unfeeling rich folks!" By contrast the maid, Syama, the untutored low-bred Syama, seemed an angel. He thanked her a thousand times in his heart for her good will to them. When he reached home, he sank down on the steps fatigued and almost broken-hearted. Sarala had felt sure of his success. She fell aweeping now that she was cruelly disappointed.

Shortly after Bidhu's return, Pramada, knowing that they had had nothing to eat that day, inquired aloud, as she stood on the veranda, "What did your mistress cook to-day, Syama?"

Syama was quick to understand Pramada's taunts, and only said, "O thank you, madam, for your very kind inquiry."

"Well, it is strange you never asked me to dinner."

"Who are you talking to, Syama?" inquired Bidhu.

Syama told him what Pramada was saying. He at once flew into a rage and exclaimed, "Such baseness! I cannot bear it. I will go and tell brother."

"No, no, you need not—you must not go," said Sarala. "Don't mind what she says. O don't lose your temper, don't, don't."

"What's that noise about there, Syama?" inquired Pramada. "Are you going to entertain any friends?"

"That's devilish I say," cried Bidhu. "Oh, I cannot bear it. We haven't had a morsel of food to eat, and she could be so mean as to taunt and insult us like that. That's more than flesh and blood can endure."

He started to his feet ready to rush out of the room, but Sarala caught his hand to stop him. "O you forget yourself," she exclaimed. "Restrain your passion, oh, do! There is nothing like

forbearance. You should not talk disrespectfully of her. She is your own elder brother's wife after all."

"Why, I should be full of reverence. Such a devil of a wife ! No, no, now let go my hand, Sarala. I will speak to brother, I will."

Releasing his hand by force, he rushed toward his brother's room. Pramada ran into her room as one affrighted, and hastily shut the door, giving the alarm that Bidhu was after her and drunk.

Just at that instant Shashibhushan heard the dash of footsteps. He started up in bed and cried, "Who is there ?"

"Brother, brother," cried Bidhu almost choked with passion, "we have had nothing the whole day to eat, and sister-in-law has been taunting us in such a shameful way."

"Nonsense," cried Pramada. "He knows not what he says. He is not in his senses now."

Shashibhushan was much annoyed. "Go you to bed now," he cried. "If you have anything to say, you can say to-morrow morning when you are sober."

"Sober !" exclaimed Bidhubhushan. "Do you mean to say that I am drunk ?"

"Get you to bed I say, and don't kick up a row here, you drunkard."

"Drunkard ! *you*," retorted Bidhu, now losing all control over himself.

"Do you dare call *me* a drunkard !" cried Shashibhushan. "Take this drunken disorderly fellow to the *thana*," was his order to his servant.

"*He* dare not come near me," cried Bidhu. "Come forward *you*, if you dare."

Shashibhushan was furious at this. Opening the door he made a rush at his brother. One thing peculiar about him was that his *dhuti* loosened whenever he gave way to passion. Both would have fallen on each other but for Sarala who,

hurrying up at the moment, forcibly led her husband into the room and shut the door.

Bidhu's eyes were bloodshot. After a moody silence of a minute or two he burst into tears. "I will not remain here, Sarala," he said. "I wish I could leave this house this moment."

"Oh, let us try and be patient in our sufferings," said Sarala. "Go not from home, but stay with us. Your presence at least will be some comfort to me. But we need not talk of it now. Now, dry your tears, for what would it avail you to weep?"

"Would you believe me, Sarala?" said Bidhu, looking up to his wife's face; "to tell you the truth I do not care for myself. All my concern is for you and that poor boy. How I wish he had not been born! How I wish you had not been married to me! Oh! then you might have been happy!"

These words gave Sarala pain beyond all measure. She tried to speak, but her feelings choked her. With her own hands she attempted to wipe the tears from her husband's eyes.

"Don't increase my pain, Sarala," exclaimed Bidhu with emotion, gently pushing her from him. "If you never loved me so well, if you never felt so much for me, if you quarrelled as most women do, then it is certain I would not feel so much for you. When I sold your ornaments, which I did at your request, oh ! how keenly I felt it. I felt it as a sharp reproach to me to partake of the food that the price of your ornaments had bought. But if you had never liked to part with your ornaments, perhaps I would not have felt so much for you. I want to propose one thing to you, Sarala. I think you had better go and live with your father for a time. As for Syama, let her go elsewhere.

Poor woman ! why should she suffer with us ?”

“How can I go and live with my father ?” said Sarala, weeping. “Oh, I can nowhere enjoy a moment, no, not even in heaven, leaving you in want and misery. Sitting down to my meal I can scarcely touch my food when I think that perhaps you suffer with hunger. Yet must I confess that more than once, thinking of our darling, I almost thought I would go. But he has never yet gone without food. Will not God whose mercy has yet preserved his life preserve him alike through all our troubles in future ? Oh, in my heart I feel sure He will, so I will not go to my father’s. But as to what you propose about Syama I quite agree with you.”

Bidhu called to Syama. This day, unlike her way, she moved so slowly, and stood before him with an expression of deep sorrow in her look.

"Syama," said Bidhu in a tone, which showed how it pained him to give utterance to what he was about to say, "we think it is unjust to allow you to continue in our service any longer. You are much inconvenienced here, and you cannot get your wages, as that is now altogether out of the question. We would advise you to go elsewhere, to try and get into some other family where you may be comfortable, for every one should seek his own interest. If, however, we be spared to see better days, you will be again welcome here." Bidhu could hardly say more for his emotion, and he hung down his head and wept in silence.

"Did I ever ask for my wages?" said Syama, crying. "I never meant to stay with you for wages. What have I to do with money? If I am a burden on you, let me take my food elsewhere. But oh!

tell me not to go, for I cannot bear my Gopal out of sight. Let me alone, I beseech you. Oh, I want nothing of you but to be let alone."

"Compose yourself, Syama," said Bidhu. "Oh, do not cry. Consider what I have said. To stay with us is to starve. It is true you love Gopal very dearly, but you may get children elsewhere to nurse, you will love them again as dearly, and you will not want to go elsewhere for your love of them after you have been with them for a time."

"It is true I may get children elsewhere to nurse, but where can I find one so good as my Gopal," said Syama, crying convulsively.

"Oh, be composed, Syama."

"I had a boy," said Syama, crying. "He was as good as my Gopal and much about his look and size. I doted on him, and fondly gave him the name of Gopal. But

here I am apt to forget he is no more. Oh, don't tell me to go elsewhere."

Bidhu turned to Sarala with tearful eyes and said, "What's to be done now?"

Sarala only wept in silence.

"I have some money," said Syama, turning to Bidhu. "I intended it for Gopal. If you would listen to my advice, I would ask you to join a *jattr*a party. In your absence we can manage to live on my savings. If ever God prosper you, you can repay my money ; and you know it will be Gopal's when I am no more."

Bidhu and Sarala were greatly moved by Syama's words. Bidhu decided upon going abroad to try his fortune, and retiring thanked her most sincerely as their only best friend in need.

The next morning he received from Syama five rupees out of her savings to defray his necessary expenses, and then formally taking leave of her, and of his

wife whose eyes overflowed with tears, and kissing his boy, left home with a heavy heart. He took the road to Calcutta where he intended to go. About noon he came near Hanskhali ; and wanting to rest he sat down at the foot of a tree by the wayside. As he sat there thinking what he should do to get his living, while he thought he should be ashamed to join a jattrā party, a man came there and sat down near him.

CHAPTER IX

BIDHUBHUSHAN MAKES THE ACQUAINTANCE OF A MAN ON THE ROAD.

THE man to whom we have referred in the preceding chapter was tall, dark-skinned, and of a rather slender make. He looked above thirty. He smoked his *huka*, which he held in his left hand. His right hand carried a bamboo stick. A *behala*, carefully wrapped up in a very dirty piece of cloth, was slung on his left shoulder. No shoes covered his feet, and being dressed only in a *dhuti* which was very dirty, he was bare from his waist up to the neck. Round his waist was tied a small bundle, which contained his things ; and a *chadur* was wrapped round his head like a *pugri*. Bidhu was quite taken up with his own thoughts, so he did not notice the stranger when he came and sat down

near him. The bubbling sound of his *huka*, however, attracted his attention.

"Who are you ?" he asked, starting at him. It seemed to him as if the stranger had just then come down out of the tree.

"Only a traveller, don't be frightened," said the stranger. "You have the courage to travel alone, and you get frightened at the sight of a man !"

"O I was not frightened," said Bidhu, laughing at this remark. "What's your name ?"

"My name is Nilkamal, and my father's name is Kalachand. My native village is Ramnagar. We are *prajas* of Devnath Bose."

Nilkamal was given to much talking. He was a half-witted man. Bidhu was quick to see that, and in order to make him talk, said, "Who is Devnath Bose ?"

"Not know Devnath Bose !" Nilkamal

was greatly surprised at his question. His impression was that Devnath Bose was the richest man in the world.

"I have never heard of him," said Bidhu. "Will you tell me about him?"

"Why, the Boses ruled at one time. They suffered great oppression at the hands of the *burgis*, who at one time, you know, were a terror in the country. But still they are immensely rich. It is very strange you haven't heard of them."

"Very strange, indeed," said Bidhu and kept quiet.

Nilkamal smoked rather thoughtfully for a while, and then holding the *huka* to Bidhu, said, "A sudra?"

"No, I am a Brahmin," said Bidhu, smiling, as he took the *chilum* only.

"Where are you going?" he asked, smoking.

"Where I am going?" said Nilkamal. "Going abroad to try my fortune. But if

you hear my story, you will pity me. Well, we are three brothers. My elder brother is called Krishnakamal, and my younger brother Ramkamal. They are idle fellows, who depend on me for their maintenance. I have often told them that they must try to make themselves useful one way or other, or they would be very miserable. But they are not the sort to hear me or anyone else who may give them a friendly advice. By following my own trade, though I worked hard, I could not make enough to make the family comfortable. I want to see what I can do abroad."

Bidhu was amused by his manner of talking, and said, "Of course you hope to do better abroad?"

"Why, I am almost sure of it. And what makes me so confident?" He lifted up his *behala* and said, "My skill, sir, my skill in this. Why, it is easy enough for me to earn my living; but that's not all.

Fortune is my aim, and I know how to make it."

"Will you just play on your *behala*?" said Bidhu, thinking he may have had some skill in music.

Nilkamal made no answer, but took up his *behala*, took off the rag in which it was wrapped up, and then putting it into tune in less than half a minute, began to play on it.

And now the tossing of the head, the rolling of the eyes and the twisting of the face, accompanied with a convulsion of the whole body while he played so as to make the stick seem to fly over the strings, made him appear to Bidhu as if he were really in hysterics.

"Can you sing?" asked Bidhu, with great difficulty repressing his laugh at this grotesque performance.

"O yes," said Nilkamal, and began at once to sing to his *behala*.

“I’ll fly where lotuses blue grow,
Should the lotus-eyed Rama command
me to go.

I’ll bring lotuses bright and fair,
To offer at the lotus feet of Mother.”

Nilkamal sang with such a ludicrous vibration of his voice that it was impossible for Bidhu this time to restrain his laugh.

Nilkamal was offended. “You laugh!” said he, leaving off singing and laying down his *behala*. “Do you mean to say that you understand singing better? Govinda Audhicari himself spoke highly of me. He offered me a salary of Rs. 10, which I declined with thanks.”

At first Nilkamal played tolerably well on the *behala*. Govinda Audhicari indeed once thought him very apt to learn, and declared that a year or two’s lessons might do wonders for him. He even offered to pay him Rs. 5/-a month just to have him under his care and train him properly;

but Nilkamal would not consent to go with him. The opinion expressed by no less a person than Govinda Audhicari was enough to turn his head, and he fancied he played on the *behala* almost like an *ustad*. He often made a boast of his acquirements, contracted the habit of tossing his head and rolling his eyes like a hysteric patient, and soon became a most unbearable musician. "Learning," he often observed, "is nothing compared with music. Books are easily mastered, but such a difficult thing is music. One may be a good scholar by continually poring over his books; but none need try to be a musician, who has no special aptitude for music." Nilkamal quite neglected his business, and devoted the whole of his time to music. Formerly he played occasionally on his *behala*, but since he came in contact with Govinda Audhicari it had been his constant companion. His

elder brother Krishnakamal milked the cows of the gentle folk of their village for two annas per cow payable within the first week of each month. It lately happened that Nilkamal was tempted to steal his brother's wages when he had got them, to buy himself a new *behala*. His brother was so enraged at his conduct that he turned him out of the house. "I tell you," said Nilkamal as he went off from home, "you will one day have to repent of it. You ignore my worth now, but go on; when I have had plenty of money, I will treat you as you deserve. I will not give you a handful of rice, though you may sit at my door and cry your eyes out, even to save you from starvation."

"Are you married?" asked Bidhu in order to pacify Nilkamal.

With all his conceitedness Nilkamal was allowed to have a good heart. He laughed

outright and said, "No ; will you find a match for me ?"

"Well, I don't know what I can do until I try. But where do you go now ?"

"To Calcutta, just to see Govinda Audhicari. He offered me a salary of Rs. 10/- some five years ago. I have since made much progress. I must have Rs. 20/- as salary now. I am sure I shouldn't take less than Rs. 15/- at any rate. And don't you think I can live on five rupees and save the rest ? Well, if I get on in that way, at the end of a year I shall have saved enough to marry a pretty looking girl. What think you, eh ?"

"He is so light-hearted," Bidhu thought to himself. "May be he left his home, because he had found no peace in it. But I am not half as confident as he is, though I understand a little of music, and better than he does. How I wish I could be as cheerful as he is. But perhaps he has

never been from home before. Perhaps he knows not what it is to be disappointed. He thinks he might easily get an offer of Rs. 15/- or even 20/- a month. But, oh ! how great would be his disappointment, when he finds that his hopes are never to be realised, and that he can hardly even expect to have a salary of Rs. 5/- under a *jattrawalla*." Thus thinking Bidhu could not but pity him.

"Well, what are you running over in your mind ? Now what think you of that ?" said Nilkamal.

"O, of course you will have saved enough at the end of a year, to marry a pretty looking girl," said Bidhu. "But you have never been from home before I suppose ?"

"No," said Nilkamal.

"You want to go to Calcutta, but do you think you can travel alone to such a distant place as that ?"

"O, I am nothing afraid."

"I am alone," Bidhu thought to himself. "I think I had better travel with this man ; he will be company for me. But he seems to have no money about him, and I can ill afford to bear his expenses on the way."

"Have you got any money about you ?" asked Bidhu.

"Money ? my money is this," said Nilkamal, holding up his *behala*. "I don't mind my having no money about me. If I but meet on the way one who understands music, I can make a week's provision for myself. You laughed, but many were moved to tears when I sang that song."

"O, it was not your singing, but the tossing of your head that excited my laugh."

"The tossing of my head ? Why, no one can help it—no one, I say, who understands music. Any one who has some taste for music will tell you that."

"Oh, of course you know better. But I wish to propose one thing to you."

"What is it?"

"I too am going to Calcutta. Let us travel together, I say."

"Well, I have no objection, but you must know you are not to have any share of what I may earn by the display of my skill in music."

"Very well," said Bidhu, smiling. The two then resumed their journey together, Nilkamal humming his favourite song and Bidhu thinking about his future.

"I'll fly where lotuses blue grow,"

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CHAPTER X

FIRST NIGHT FROM HOME.

AT nightfall Bidhu and Nilkamal came to a bazaar where they began to seek a place where they might be comfortably lodged for the night. In the bazaar were several mean shops with roofs of thatch ; but these were all occupied, and in not one of them could they be accommodated for the night. So on they went and discovered a light dimly burning in a house, which stood a little way off from the bazaar. They walked up to it. It was a *mudi's* shop standing by itself in the midst of a few mango trees, so that it was not quite visible at a little distance after sun-set. Travellers would not care to go there, if they could be lodged in the bazaar without any great inconvenience to themselves. Though there had come two travellers there, there was room

enough for one or two persons more. The *mudi* was not in. He was gone to market not far away. His wife minded the shop in his absence.

"Can we be lodged in your shop for to-night?" inquired Bidhu.

"To what caste do you belong?" asked the *mudi's* wife.

"I am a Brahmin," said Bidhu; "but my companion here is a sudra."

"You may lodge here, if you like, and here are also two other Brahmins, but as for your companion, I don't know where to find a place for him to sleep in, unless he would agree to pass the night under one of the trees there; for being a sudra he cannot be lodged with the Brahmins, you know."

Bidhu turned to his companion and said, "What say you to that, Nilkamal?"

"There will be room for me in that shed there. I think I can go there?"

said Nilkamal, turning to the *mudi's* wife.

"No, that's the place for the cow," said the *mudi's* wife.

"The cow can stay out under one of the trees for to-night."

"Yes, to make room for you as if you were my *guru*. You can travel a long distance on foot, and you cannot pass a night in the open air?"

Nilkamal was offended. "Come along," said he to Bidhu. "We mustn't lodge here. We can put up within the village."

Bidhu was too much fatigued. He only said, "You may go elsewhere, if you like," and went and took his seat inside the shop.

Nilkamal was greatly offended at this. He instantly turned his back on his companion, as he said, "Good-bye to you, we part never to meet again."

Nilkamal walked a little distance, and

then stopped. He was a timid and cowardly man. The night was dark, and the path leading into the village was such a one that it was not very safe for a stranger to walk it without a light. He now felt he had acted hastily. Much as he wished to go back he felt shame to do so. He, however, soon got the better of his sense of shame ; and slowly retracing his steps, came and stood in the shop-yard again. "It is not just right," said he to Bidhu, speaking aloud, "to leave you alone in the time of night, and so I have come back."

Bidhu, who by this time had known his companion well enough not to doubt he would return, only said with a smile, "I am glad you are back, Nilkamal."

"You may rest where you are," said Nilkamal. "I must be content to pass the night under one of the trees, as there is no helping it, I suppose."

What Nilkamal, however, had in his

mind was that either they must both pass the night in the open air, or he must disturb the rest of his companion by singing the whole night.

Bidhu sat near the two Brahmins, who had come before him. His clothes, as we have before observed, were shabby, but these two Brahmins were well dressed. By conversing with them Bidhu knew they were students, who prosecuted their studies at college in Calcutta, whither they were returning at the end of their winter vacation. The *mudi's* wife was busy getting things ready for them to prepare their evening meal. Indeed she seemed most anxious to please and oblige them as she best could. To our friend, Bidhu, however, she was rather indifferent. She wanted to be told thrice or four times to do a thing he wanted done ; and then it was evidently not very willingly done. Bidhu was greatly in need of a meal,

having eaten nothing the whole day. On asking the *mudi*'s wife to know where he might cook his food, she bluntly said, "In that corner there. Take down that *handi* there, and for fuel there are bundles of sticks in the shed."

Bidhu was indignant at this answer and said, "What's the good of my coming here if I am to do everything for myself?"

"And who wanted you to come here?" she said snappishly.

Bidhu was very angry now. But what did his anger signify? He was not at home in his own house. This he felt. So stifling his indignation as best he could, and smiling, he rather facetiously said, "You treat me cruelly. I am sure I don't deserve to be thus cruelly treated."

Being displeased with his humour the *mudi*'s wife said at once, "None of your jokes, sir, if you please." I tell you this plain thing—if you want to stay, you are

not to ask me to do a thing you can very well do for yourself."

Bidhu could no longer brook her impertinence. Burning with indignation he exclaimed, "You are a wretch to talk like that. I will not stay another minute in your shop."

As he was about to leave, in came the *mudi*, carrying a burden on his head. "What's the row about?" he inquired, helping himself down with the burden.

"Why, here is a nabob who will not move a step to have what he wants," said the *mudi's* wife.

Turning to Bidhu, the *mudi* said, "What caste do you belong to?"

"I am a Brahmin," said Bidhu.

The *mudi* made a low obeisance and said, "I am at your service, sir; sit down there please."

Bidhu complied with his request. Nilkamal was brave now and said, "Such

insolence ! I cannot bear it, nobody can. I had a great good mind to—”

Nilkamal did not complete the sentence. He did not dare to do it for fear of offending the *mudi*, who was a match for a dozen like him.

The two Brahmins who seemed much to interest the *mudi*'s wife were of youthful age. They had been newly converted to Brahmaism. During the *gulmal* they were at prayers. One was solemnly speaking the praise of God in a low murmuring voice ; his eyes were shut. The other, though he sat in a prayerful attitude, stole now and then a glance at the *mudi*'s wife while he constantly kept his eyes on his companion, as if he was fearful of detection. But he shut his eyes and pretended to be deep in his devotion, as the *mudi* made his appearance.

“Who are these fellows ?” asked the *mudi* in a rough tone.

"They are Brahmins", said his wife
"College students. They are praying to
God. Please don't disturb them now."

The *mudi* at once got offended with his wife. "Why did you allow them to enter the shop?" he said rather angrily. "No Brahmins they are, but Brahmas. I knew that at a glance. The Brahmas, I know, are a class of men who eat food of any man's cooking. They are no better than *mlechchas*."

Then turning to the young men he said, "Get out sirs, I am a Hindu. You cannot be lodged here. Come, out, sirs, pack out, I say. How do you expect to be allowed to take up a Hindu house?"

The young men opened their eyes as though they woke up from a profound slumber, and looking up saw before them the rough tall figure of the rustic *mudi* whose loud, but resolute, voice wanted them to leave the shop without a moment's delay.

"Don't be angry with us, friend," they spoke together in an almost imploring tone. "We are Brahmins, we are not telling you a lie."

"Nonsense. Come, on your legs, sirs, and don't keep me waiting for nothing." This he said, darting an angry look at the young man whose eyes had fully betrayed his character. The angry look of the *mudi* seemed so significant to him that he turned his face away to avoid it.

But as the young men still held their seats, and seemed rather unwilling to leave the shop, the *mudi* grew exceedingly angry, and stepping up seized the aforesaid young man by the arm, as he exclaimed, "Get out, sirs, or I shan't answer for what I may do." As he said this, he looked significantly about him. A stout stick stood against one corner of the room. Directly the young men caught sight of it,

without another word they got up and left the shop.

After they had been gone and the room had been cleared, the *mudi* said to his wife, "You were very busy attending on those two fellows, eh? To attend on them so diligently and quite neglect the other two customers! Very fine indeed."

The *mudi*'s wife kept quiet, for she too well knew her husband's temper.

Now when there was no longer any *gulmal*, the *mudi* sat him down to smoke a *chilum* of tobacco. His wife, transformed as if by magic into a good gentle creature was found so willing and obedient now that before long Bidhu and Nilkamal finished their meal, and were ready to lie down to rest for the night. For Nilkamal there was now room enough within the room. For each a mat to sleep on was spread on the dry mud floor of the shop room,

and the bundle of each served for a pillow. They laid them down to rest.

For a long time Bidhu could get no sleep. The thought of his wife and child was uppermost in his mind. Besides he was in a strange place and exposed to all the inconveniences of having to spend a night at a paltry shop on the way. Nilkamal, however, quickly fell asleep; and as he lay snoring on his back, he seemed to have very few cares. For the first time in his life Bidhu experienced the pangs of separation. The room was dark. He looked beyond, and there were the trees, which stood like ghosts with their long outspreading branches. The mice ran about squeaking and making all sorts of queer noise. There were also the cockroaches crawling all about or flying. A superstitious fear seized on him. "Nilkamal, Nilkamal," he called, sitting up as though he could hardly be lying any

longer. Nilkamal turned upon his side as he muttered drowsily, "Let me alone, don't disturb me now."

"Get up, Nilkamal ; won't you have a smoke? It is not wise to sleep so soundly on the way."

Nilkamal was awake now. "Why, what harm is it?" he said. "I need have no fear from thieves."

"I know that," said Bidhu, laughing ; "but I do not mean that. I have a favour to ask of you. You have a very fine hand on the *behala*, but I have scarcely any commendation. If you will kindly teach me how to play on the *behala*, I shall be indebted to you."

Nilkamal felt greatly flattered. "Oh, I shall be very glad to teach you," he said, sitting up abruptly. "Nothing would give me a greater pleasure, I assure you. Shall we begin now—to-night?"

"O yes, the sooner the better," said Bidhu.

Nilkamal was quickly ready with his *behala* and said, as he was about to begin, "Now, pay close attention while I play."

With this he began to play and sing his favourite song in his usual ludicrous manner, while Bidhu lay down again and quietly went to sleep.

CHAPTER XI

HEM AND HIS SISTER SVARNALATA

BIPRADAS CHAKRAVARTI of the district of Burdwan was a rich man. He was not born in a rich family ; but he held a lucrative post in the Commissariat, and he was in the service at the time of the Sepoy mutiny of 1857. This post that he held became the source of his prosperity. Throughout the period of his service his heart was set on gain, in which he was never very scrupulous. He was one of those old-clàss orthodox Hindus of his time, who, though otherwise very good in their way, were not very conscientious in the acquisition of money. Though he had great prosperity, he was not proud, but on the contrary was very obliging and kind. Far from stingy in his habits, he spent money with no sparing hand, but he was by no means lavish in

his expenses. He was pious and hospitable. The Durgapuja and all the other pujas were celebrated at his house at much expense and with great festivity. His wife, however, did not live long to share in his prosperity. After her death he was a retired man, and lived with his family at his own house in the country. He had a son and a daughter. The son was called Hemchandra, and the daughter, Svarnalata. He was a very kind and indulgent parent, who liked to make allowances for young people.

The Durgapuja festival was at hand. Those of the village, who had been staying away, being either in Government service or in private service, were all come home for the Puja holidays, to which they had been wistfully looking forward. Hem was come home. His father liked to be regularly present at his meals. This he did in affectionate care of his son, lest

anything in the world should ever remind him that he was an orphan.

Bipradas often said to his mother, for his mother was alive, "Mother, Hem is very dear to me. I should never like to oppose his will in anything."

One day Bipradas, not seeing his daughter, inquired, "Where is Svarna, mother?"

Hearing her father ask for her, Svarna at once ran to him with outstretched arms, crying, "Here I am, papa, I was in my brother's room."

"You are a good dear," said her father as he affectionately took his daughter up in his arms. "How have you daubed your face and hands with ink, my love?"

"I have been learning to write with brother, papa."

"Learning to write? What's the use of your ever learning to write, my love?"

"Why, what's the harm in her learning to write, papa?" said Hem as he quickly appeared before his father, when he heard him make that remark. "Most girls read and write. There are girls' schools in Calcutta."

"Well, well, you may do as you like, but who is to teach her while you are away?"

"She will teach herself, papa. She has learnt to write the alphabet quickly enough. I dare say she will have made much progress before I leave for Calcutta. She seems so willing to learn."

Bipradas tenderly passed his hand over his daughter and said, "You would be a Sarasvati or a Lakshmi, which, dear?"

"I would wish to be both, papa."

Her father looked on her for a moment with feelings of great parental tenderness. A tear stood in his eye. He gently set her down as he kissed her forehead and

said, "Go and learn to write with your brother, my love."

The Puja soon came on. The three days of the Puja passed in feasting and merriment. Even in those hours of bustle and activity, not for a moment did Bipradas forget his own children. The vacation was soon over, and Hem returned to Calcutta. When the day came on which he was to start, his sister had really made much progress in reading and writing.

"I will soon send you a new book," said Hem to his sister at parting. "But if you can write a letter to me, I will give you a beautiful flower of gold to wear on your *khonpa*, when I come home again in the month of *Choitra*."

"You are sure you won't forget?" said Svarna, smiling.

Her brother said, "I am sure I shall not, but you must try to win the prize."

CHAPTER XII

PRAMADA COMMITS THE DOMESTIC CONCERNS TO HER MOTHER'S MANAGEMENT

AFTER the separation of the brothers, of which her wicked self was the cause, Pramada had never quarrelled with any one for some days. But after that, as might be expected, she grew tired of the sort of life she was never accustomed to, and at last was minded to pick a quarrel with *thakrundidi* Digambari, though it was very kind of her to take charge of the kitchen for the help of her neighbour. She wanted to pick a quarrel with her, because she was ugly, black of skin, and pilfered her salt, mustard oil and the like, which no mistress of a house could tolerate. Did she dare to accuse her of all this to her face? Oh, no; *thakrundidi* Digambari would then have left her house

that instant never to cross her threshold again. But she went about and told tales. Digambari was soon told of the imputations against her character. One day she looked sullen, the next she bore herself defiantly, and on the third day openly declared her intention to fight Pramada. What did she care for Pramada or for her husband? Accordingly there was an encounter. Both gave loose to their tongues, and accused and abused each other with an astonishing fluency. The quarrel was managed with proper spirit on both sides, till it was abruptly brought to an end by *thakrundi* Digambari, who treading up, defiantly thrust her thumbs at Pramada's face, as she followed up that action with such words as 'she was not her paid servant, she did not care a fig for her,' and what else her tongue could lay hold on, and then triumphantly left the field of action to the utter discomfiture

of her enemy. Pramada had never been beaten at a quarrel before. But in this she had found her match.

Pramada was so mortified that she went and shut herself up in her room and wept bitterly. She, however, soon dried her tears ; and though she deeply felt her humiliation, she was forced to put on a look of perfect unconcern in the presence of her husband. When Shashibhushan, after his return from *kachari* at the usual time, inquired of his wife about *thakrundidi* Digambari, she answered without the least hesitation, "I have sent her away." Her vanity would not permit her to tell the honest truth.

"Sent her away !" exclaimed Shashibhushan. "What was her fault, pray ?"

Pramada told her husband a string of lies in justification of her conduct. She was warm in her praise of *thakrundidi* Digambari not long ago, and now that

she declared that she was a wicked impudent woman, her husband said, "You are a strange character, my dear ; you extol a neighbour this day and cry her down again the next. But who is to prepare our meals now ? You cannot because of your poor health. What's to be done now ?"

"You needn't be anxious about having your meals in time."

"I do not care for myself. I mean to say I cannot bear to see the children go without their meals when they shouldn't."

"No one need go without his meals in the house," said Pramada, looking very grave. "I am going to have mother here to-morrow. I am sure she will come when she knows how things now stand here."

Shashibhushan knew perfectly well what the coming of Pramada's mother implied. He looked embarrassed and rather uncon-

ciously said, "How I wish I had never separated from my brother."

Pramada's brother was not to be left behind if his mother went to live with her daughter, as there was no one else in the house to prepare his meals. Then there was Pramada's maternal uncle. This gentleman, it was probable, would not like to live alone, and would pack up if the rest of the family left. Shashibhushan saw all this in a moment and said, quite forgetting in his embarrassment in whose presence he was, "How I wish I had not separated from my brother."

"Who wanted you to separate?" said Pramada in a tone which showed that she was offended.

Shashibhushan made no answer. He was evidently occupied with his own thoughts.

"Who wanted you to separate?" repeated his wife. I didn't and you know it.

Why do you keep quiet and hang down your head like that? You need not be ashamed to tell the honest truth that you have yourself to thank for it and no one else."

Shashibhushan was still silent, and his wife continued, "But no one prevents you from living jointly with your brother again, as you used to do. That is absolutely in your power. Why, you cannot have a better friend in the world than your precious brother. But I think I may be easily spared, if I am a trouble to you. I know I am a trouble to you, yes, I can see that without your telling me. I must insist on your sending me to my father's."

Shashibhushan now looked up into his wife's face and said, "I didn't mean any offence, my dear, I am sure I didn't."

"What do you mean? What would you have? Come, out with it. There is nothing like plain-dealing. I always seek

your interest. Perhaps that is my fault. But why do you not send me to my father's house and get rid of me at once?"

"I am very sorry I have offended you, my dear. I beg your pardon."

Pramada was sullen.

"Where are the children?" asked Shashibhushan, wanting to give a turn to this unpleasant conversation.

"Bepin is gone to see his grandmother," said Pramada without looking up.

"And Kamini?"

"Gone to bed."

"Gone to bed? She won't take her food to-night?"

"Who is to cook?"

"I don't mind cooking myself."

Shashibhushan went to engage himself in the duties of the kitchen, and Pramada took to her bed, declaring that her complaint had proved very troublesome to her.

Pramada wanted to be coaxed and begged hard to get out of bed, when her supper was brought in, though it must be said that the aggravation of her complaint did not prevent her from doing full justice to her meal.

"I think you ought to have told Bepin to bring his grandmother with him," observed Shashibhushan, as his wife had just finished her meal.

Pramada had sent Bepin to fetch her mother and not merely to see her as she had told her husband. So when Shashibhushan made that remark rather out of curiosity to know what she would say to it, she looked rather confused and said nothing.

Shashibhushan was sleepy and began to yawn, after he had sat in silence for a while. So he rose and went to bed and quickly fell asleep. Pramada also went and laid her down by him. The night passed in sleep.

When Bepin communicated the news he bore, to his grandmother, that worthy lady was simply joyous. She would have been so glad to come at once, but her son not being at home, she was compelled to put off her departure till the next morning. Yet so great was her impatience to be gone that all that night she could not sleep a wink for her excitement, and eagerly awaited the return of morn. She could not but be in a passion with her son whom she reproached within herself for his foolish absence from home. It was not till after sunset that Gadadhar returned. Gadadhar was the name of Pramada's brother.

We shall describe this gentleman in a few words. He was tall, darkcomplexioned and hunger-bitten, with a remarkably small head, of which the hair was stiff, a somewhat slender neck and large and clumsy feet. He spoke with a some-

what nasal accent, and he was bad and idiotic. His mother's complaint was that Pramada was quite indifferent about his education, which, to her thinking, she owed as a duty to her brother. Pramada's apathy in this particular was, therefore, held by her mother to be truly culpable.

"Well, Bepin, what brings you here now?" asked Gadadhar as he met his nephew on his return at dusk.

"Where have you been so long, Gadadhar Chandra?" asked his mother as Bepin was about to reply.

His mother loved to call him Gadadhar Chandra, though he was contemptuously called Gada in the neighbourhood.

"What could keep you so long, my love?" his mother repeated her query.

"Business, mother, business."

"Ah, the every-day business of uselessly spending your precious time. Here is our child Bepin, you don't seem to think

that it is your duty to make him comfortable while he is with us."

"He can make himself comfortable. He is quite free here."

He then turned to his nephew and said, "Make yourself at home, Bepin. Do you smoke, dear?"

"What a foolish question!" interposed his mother. "He is too young to smoke."

"Nonsense, mother; you must remember I took to smoking when I was about his age." Turning to the boy he said again, "Well, do you smoke, Bepin?"—"No," said the boy, looking rather ashamed.

"But I want very much to have a smoke," said Gadadhar. "Mother, prepare a *chilum* of tobacco."

As his mother moved to carry out his order, for she always attended to this business herself for her excessive fondness for her son, he inquired again, "What brings you here now, Bepin?"

"I have come for grandmother," replied Bepin.

"That's very good," said Gadadhar with a mirthful laugh. "There can be nothing better."

Turning to his mother he said, "You must confess you were wrong, mother, when you made the remark that Pramada was getting strange."

As this was spoken in the presence of Bepin, from prudential motives his mother at once denied the charge, saying, "When did I make that remark, Gadadhar Chandra? How very foolish of you to talk like that!"

Gadadhar was going to make some remark, but just then his mother put the *huka* in his hand and said again, "Now, smoke and don't talk nonsense."

Gadadhar said no more. He soon seemed to very much enjoy his *chilum* of tobacco as he sent forth puffs of

smoke which curled and played about his head.

"Will you go and find some shrimps, Gadadhar Chandra? For your nephew will have no fish to eat, if you don't try and get some."

"I can't go now, mother. The *dal* will do. Cook the *dal* that sister has sent."

His mother frowned as much as to say, "You are not to mention that before your nephew."

"Don't look like that, mother, or you would frighten me out of my wits."

"You are a bad and stupid boy," said his mother rather angrily.

"I say it is no use your trying to keep anything from me. Do you mean to say that no *dal* was sent? If you do, you are telling a downright lie."

"Gadadhar Chandra, I am sure I am not to stand this nonsense from you," cried his mother, darting an angry look at him.

"None of your temper, mother, or I shall expose you in a manner you can never think of."

As the safest course that she could adopt was to retire, she left the room as she remarked, "I am really ashamed of you, Gadadhar Chandra, I am really ashamed of you."

Gadadhar talked with Bepin till his mother wanted them to come to supper ; after which they went to bed together and quickly fell asleep.

Not a wink of sleep, however, for Gadadhar's mother who, while she was engaged the whole night in putting things in order and making preparations for their departure, every now and then looked out to see if it was still night.

The next morning Shashibhushan had just got out of bed when Gadadhar showed himself immediately followed by his mother, who walked right in front of Bepin.

“Here we are at last. Where are you, sister ?” cried Gadadhar.

Pramada was not yet up from bed, but as soon as she heard her brother's voice, she got up with a start and hastened to give them a proper reception. She led them into her bed room ; and when they had seated themselves, she sat down by them, and they had a long chat together. Shashibhushan regarded his brother-in-law with feelings of great repugnance and mistrust.

Gadadhar did not like talking, so he very soon set about a downright inspection of the house. He went all round the house and over it, looked into every place that seemed queer to him, and stopped to examine anything that particularly attracted his attention. In two or three days he knew every nook and corner of the house. Nothing, while he lived at his brother-in-law's house, could escape

his searching eye, and sweetmeats in particular were always sure to be missing, though they might be put away in a secret place behind the bedstead, or elsewhere where they were considered to be safe.

For the first time that morning Pramada studied to appear most agreeable, and paid great attentions to her mother and brother. Shashibhushan, however, was very much vexed. He looked upon Pramada's brother, as though he were his evil genius, whose very look seemed so ominous to him. By and by Pramada's mother had the domestic management all to herself, and became to all intents and purposes the mistress of the house. And thus was it, as an inevitable outcome of this arrangement of things, that Shashibhushan lost his personal independence in his own house. Gadadhar was put to school at his mother's request, and all things seemed to go on well for a time.

CHAPTER XIII

SARALA MISSES HER HUSBAND

WHEN Bidhubhushan was gone, Sarala was very very miserable. Why had she let him go? Was not starving a thousand times better than his separation? Yet if he had stayed, would it not have been selfish and unkind of her to let him suffer on her account? How much it would have pained her to see him go without food! How much it would have distressed him to see their dear child suffer hunger without a murmur! She recollected when her husband had spoken a kind word to her, or when he had seemed to be kinder than at other times. The thought of how she was grieved at seeing her husband lose his temper at anything, or at hearing of his having quarrelled with any one never occurred to her now. But she thought of his sufferings when he was

ever laid on a bed of sickness by fever or perhaps a bad headache or other illness. Should he fall ill abroad? Who would attend his sick bed? Who would nurse him? These thoughts made her feel very miserable, as she sat on the roof, resting her head on her hand and shedding tears in abundance.

When Bidhubhushan left, Sarala had ascended the roof to watch him. With a fixed look she followed him with her eye as long as she could. Bidhubhushan also stopped frequently to look back at his wife, till a peepul tree altogether screened her from his sight, and he saw her no more. Then with a deep sigh he wiped the tears from his eyes. Sarala sat on where she was. She wished she could run and induce him yet to return. But to what? To want and disgrace? She would rather miss his company than see him back to his sufferings. But she could have felt happy and

contented with her lot, if Pramada had let her win her bread by her drudgery in the family and spared her feelings. Sarala was too deeply occupied with her own thoughts to notice the flight of time. There she was though it was nearly noon, and Syama had done the cleaning and washing, and made the necessary arrangements for the preparation of the meal.

"You are still here !" said Syama, reproving her gently.

Sarala turned with a start and quickly dried her tears.

"Come, cheer up," Syama went on by way of consolation. "Don't be brooding over it. Husbands are going from home every day. It won't do for them to be tied down to their wives at home. Be of good cheer. Fortune may favour him, and you may be happy, yet, happier than you can think."

"But come, get up now, it is nearly

noon, and you have to prepare the meal, she said again after a brief pause.

"I have no appetite, Syama. You go and cook your own meal".

"But Gopal is not to fast. He will be home very soon from *pathshala*".

"O, my child, how could I have forgot our own child. But is it so late as you say?"

She looked up and saw the sun was nearly overhead. She hastened downstairs, and quickly busied herself in preparing the meal. When it was ready, Gopal had his dinner brought him in a small plate. Syama ate as usual, but Sarala could eat little or nothing.

That day passed, and the next and next. Thus days came and went; and though after a time Sarala no longer felt the pangs of separation, the anxiety remained which ate into her vitals like the canker-worm. Had there been no lessening of

pain and sorrow in this world, life would have become an insupportable burden.

Pramada had sent for her mother a few days after the separation of the brothers. So long as Bidhubhushan was at home, Gadadhar and his mother had not dared to insult his wife in any way, nor had they exchanged a word with her, though Pramada occasionally made cutting remarks, to which Sarala would pay no heed at all. Now that Bidhubhushan was away, Pramada and her mother and brother meanly took advantage of his absence to torment Sarala by bringing all their combined energy to bear upon it.

"What has become of your good sweet master, Syama?" Pramada tauntingly asked one day, as she stood on the veranda. "I have seen nothing of him for sometime."

"Why, you, will see him again, if you are not called away too soon, madam."

"What! dare you talk to me in that fashion! A good shoe-beating would cure you of your impudence."

"Shoe-beating!" cried Syama in a passion.

"Oh, keep quiet, Syama," exclaimed Sarala. "Let her say what she likes? Keep quiet, do."

"Why should she say what she likes? What right has she? I won't bear with her, not I. And I am not at all afraid of her husband."

"Go on, I will humble your pride."

"I despise your threat," cried Syama.

Pramada retreated. The blood rose to her neck and face. She was too much enlarged to speak. Her breathing was quick, and the frequent ringing of her ornaments indicated the violent movement of her limbs. Prānada's mother looked as though she had dropped from the clouds. She would fain have taken 'the

side of her daughter, but she was cowed down by the boldness of Syama.

"Be composed, daughter, be composed," she said. "Instigation, nothing but instigation, I can tell you. Speak to your husband to-night, do. Let us see what he says. Why, it is dreadful to live here."

Pramada's mother had just spoken those words when Gadadhar made his appearance.

"What's the matter, sister?" asked Gadadhar in some surprise, noticing the angry look of Pramada; for he was not in and knew not what was the matter.

His sister saying nothing, he asked again, "What's the matter, sister?"

"Hold your tongue, you poor unfortunate pitiful idiot," said Pramada petulantly.

Gadadhar had grown very proud of his new home, having a bellyful to eat, and

living a sort of reckless life without any thought or care. So when his sister reproached him in those epithets, he looked on as if he would say, "What do you mean, sister?"

His mother, however, explained the matter to him, and he at once flew into a fury and exclaimed, "The wretch! I will teach her a good lesson." With this he snatched up a *lathi*, which stood against a corner, and rushed toward Sarala's room to punish Syama.

"I will see which of us is stronger, you or I," he cried. "And I would wish to teach your instigator a lesson too."

Neither Pramada nor her mother prevented him. They rather seemed to very much enjoy it.

Sarala was terrified and hastened to shut the door; but Syama prevented her, saying, "Don't shut the door, he is a coward." Then catching up a knife and

standing at the door, she cried, "Where is that idiot, I'll cut off his ears, I will."

Gadadhar was at once brought to a standstill, when he but beheld a knife in Syama's hand. Not daring to set a step further, he cried, "What ! cut off my ears, you ugly scold ! I will go to the *thana*."

"Go, I don't care," cried Syama. The police-station was in that village. Gadadhar was acquainted with a constable there ; and he thought that if he went and asked him, he would readily come with him, and so Syama would be quickly brought to her senses. So thinking he ran to the *thana*. The constable, to whom he was known, then happening to be making some entries, he stepped up to the *daraga* and said, "Sir, Syama wants to cut off my ears."

"Who are you ?" asked the *daraga*.

"I—I—you—know Shashi Babu of course, sir ? He is my sister's husband."

"What did you say was the name of the other party?"

"Syama, sir."

"Have you any relation with her?"

"Oh, no, a servant woman, sir."

"What's your name?"

"Gadadhar Chandra Chakravarti."

"And your father's name?"

"It is no use my telling you his name, sir. You don't know him."

"Never mind, sir, I want your father's name."

"My father's name is Ramdev Chakravarti."

"Well, what's your occupation?"

"I go to school, sir."

"Who pays for your going to school?"

"Father—no, my sister, sir."

"You are not sure, which?"

"I am quite sure, my sister, sir, and I am ready to swear."

"How funny. No, there is no need to

swear." And turning to the constable, who all the while had been laughing with his face turned away, the *daraga* said, "Ramesh, do you know this fellow?"

"Yes, sir," said Ramesh. And he gave such a glowing account of Gadadhar that the *daraga* said at once, "Well, my dear fellow, I will see to your case. What's that woman's name again? But never mind her name. Now, do you say she has cut off your ears?"

Gadadhar unconsciously raised his hand to his ear.

"Do you miss it?" asked the *daraga*, being amused.

"No, sir; but she has threatened to cut off my ears."

"A woman has threatened to cut off your ears, and you are here to complain against her! Oh, I am ashamed of you."

"Not the sort of a woman you think her to be. If you saw her look as she

did, as she shook her knife at me and swore at me, you would be afraid yourself."

"Oh, then she must be a terrible woman."

"A most terrible woman, sir ; she must be taught such a lesson as she would never forget in her life."

"Yes, but you see we can't do anything unless she has done some injury to you. So you had better go back and pick a quarrel with her again ; and when she has cut off your ears, just come to me, and we shall see if we can get the law to hang her for it."

But as the *daraga* said this in a tone which plainly showed that he was in joke, Gadadhar exclaimed, "If you are not going to take up my case, I must go to the District Court."

"You had better do so, for yours is too big a case to be tried here."

Gadadhar looked offended, and was about to come away, when the *daraga*, telling Ramesh in a whisper that he was going to have a bit of fun, called a constable, and said, pointing to Gadadhar, "To the lockup."

"You order *me* to the lockup!" cried Gadadhar, turning to the *daraga*.

"Hush! don't make a fuss, sir," said the constable, Hari Sing, stepping up and forcibly leading him on by the arm.

"You shall regret it," cried Gadadhar, as he struggled to make him let go his arm.

"No resistance, sir, or I must handcuff you," said Hari Sing.

Gadadhar, not having any idea of handcuffs, and probably thinking that they must be something worse than the lockup, suffered himself to be quietly led on.

"You don't know who I am," said Gadadhar as they reached the door of the

lockup. He was about to say something about his respectable connection, when Hari Sing most unceremoniously thrust him in and locked the door, saying, "Can't help, sir, must do my duty."

Gadadhar found the cell so dark and close that he screamed for fright and begged Hari Sing with many entreaties to let him out. No one heeded his cries, and there he was left shrieking and entreating and crying as hard as he might.

Some two hours after the *daraga* walked up to the door of the lockup. "Open the door," he said to Hari Sing. No sooner was the order executed than out rushed Gadadhar ; but the *daraga* stopped him, and in a sufficiently severe tone, said, "There, will you pick a quarrel with a woman again ?"

"No, sir, never," said Gadadhar, looking imploringly up to his face.

"Down on your knees and drag your

nose over up to the mark I am about to make on the ground."

Gadadhar at once obeyed through sheer dread of the lockup.

"Rise," said the *daraga*, "and begone, and let me hear of you no more."

Shashibhushan had come home a little after Gadadhar had gone to the *thana*. The *kachari* was closed a little earlier that day. On his return, seeing that his wife was sullen he asked the cause of it. Pramada told him all save that she was the aggressor. Shashibhushan was indignant, and Pramada's mother opportunely threw in a word or two. But what did his anger signify? He could neither chastise Syama nor go to law to punish her insolence. It was wise to pocket the insult; and so he held his tongue.

CHAPTER XIV

SHASHIBHUSHAN GETS SOME ACCOUNTS SIGNED BY HIS MASTER

SHASHIBHUSHAN prospered so well that he found himself a substantial man within a few years of his entrance into Zamindari service. He entered on Rs. 5/- a month, but he quickly succeeded in securing such favour with his master that he got one lift after another, till he filled a very respectable post with salary Rs. 25/- He now needed but one more lift to make him *dewan*. And not long afterwards the master began seriously to think of raising him to the highest post in his gift, not that the *dewan* was incompetent ; but that he believed Shashibhushan would manage far better, being a very intelligent man, and not want to often trouble him with this, that, and the other thing. To look

over accounts was a tedious task. The master loved pleasure far better than work, and wanted to have more leisure just that he might the better enjoy the company of his congenial friends. His ancestors, however, gave themselves no thought of pleasure. They kept excellent health, and working hard had managed with only two or three hands in their employ better than he did with nearly a dozen.

Shashibhushan had all those qualities which often help to make a man's fortune in the world. Though he had very few scruples, he was active and intelligent, shrewd in business, and best knew how to ingratiate himself with one whose favour he wanted to gain. No wonder he should have so easily succeeded in winning a place in his master's heart.

The master had great confidence in Shashibhushan. Could his subordinates be anything but honest? All payments

were made by him ; and whatever he did was all right and did not require the master's inspection.

Having got ready the accounts of some construction works Shashibhushan proceeded for the sanction of them to his master.

"What are those papers ?" asked the master as Shashibhushan entered.

There was a drinking party in the *baitakhana* ; and the brandy bottle was quickly transferred behind the couch at a look from the master.

"I have got the accounts of the construction works ready, sir," said Shashibhushan, walking up and standing before him, holding the papers in his hand.

"You are sure there is no mistake ?"

"I dare say there is none, but I cannot be certain until you have once looked over the papers yourself."

The master took this as a compliment

to himself, as rather implying that he was an adept at accounts. "I don't want to look over them," he said. "I should be sure the figures are all correct."

One of Shashibhushan's subordinates, who had accompanied him, gave him a significant look ; but Shashibhushan at once met it with a frown, and the subordinate looked down on the ground.

"I think you had better dismiss them if there is nothing else to look over," said one of the master's friends in a whisper.

The master paused a little and then said, "You do not wish me to look over anything else just now ?"

"No, sir ; but I am sure this will not take time," said Shashibhushan, turning over the papers very quickly in his hand.

There was the uncorked brandy bottle behind the couch, and there also was some liquor poured into the glass, which would

lose its strength, if allowed to stand for any long time. So the master said, "There is no need to look over the accounts. I should just like to know the total cost."

"The total cost is thirty-one thousand three hundred and thirteen," said Shashibhushan, whose voice shook a little as he told this downright lie.

"And what was the estimate?"

"Twenty-four thousand rupees." But the answer was made not without some hesitation. The master was rather surprised. But was it not rather shameful to look over the accounts for the matter of the difference of a few thousands in the presence of his friends? The master felt it was.

"The cost often exceeds the estimate," observed one of the friends.

For his vanity rather than for what his friend remarked, the master quietly took the papers from Shashibhushan's hand,

signed them, and then handed them back with a look of supreme indifference.

Having gained what he wanted Shashibhushan returned to the *kachari* in high feather. In the evening he went home with his subordinates to divide the money thus got among themselves.

CHAPTER XV

HOW IS SHASHIBHUSHAN TO DISPOSE OF HIS SHARE OF HIS OLD PATERNAL HOUSE ?

SHASHIBHUSHAN soon became *dewan*. After Gadadhar and his mother had come, there was some inconvenience for want of sufficient accommodation in the house. There was the *baitakhana* in an unfinished state. Shashibhushan now thought that he must have it completed, and told his wife so. Pramada, however, was not of his mind. She hated his brother, and could not like him to have his share of the *baitakhana*. She, therefore, said that if her advice was worth anything, she should like him to have a separate *baitakhana* of his own. Shashibhushan had not the moral courage to say, *no*, even if he would, and so had nothing but to do as his wife wished.

It soon happened that Shashibhushan was offered a plot of land for sale in the neighbourhood and agreed to purchase it for his *baitakhana*. But the question was in whose name it should be purchased. Not in his own name surely, as then his brother might want to get a share of it. Neither in the name of his wife for the same reason. This seemed a very important question to settle ; but Shashibhushan never settled it, for when the plot of land was purchased, it was, as one might have anticipated, purchased in the name of his wife.

At first the intention was only to have a *baitakhana*. But after the building work had commenced, Pramada showing how greatly they stood in need of a good comfortable house of their own, Shashibhushan had a plan drawn up, and in a few months a very decent two-storied house was built up. To it Shashibhushan

removed with his wife and children. But how was he to dispose of his share of his old paternal house ? He would not mind his brother having the whole house to himself. But he was not his own master ; so he one day asked his wife.

Pramada looked up into her husband's face as if to try to read his thoughts in it. "I should like to know first what you think," she said, smiling.

"Why," said Shashibhushan, looking away, as if he dared not look his wife in the face, "I think of giving up my share of the house to Bīdhu. I think we can well afford to spare it now that we have got a house of our own."

Just as he said this, he turned his eyes to his wife, and observed a cloud in her face where a moment ago there was not a trace of it. Shashibhushan was afraid lest he should have an unquiet house, and hastened to mend his speech. "Why, my

dear," he said, "I only meant to consult you on the matter. You know I am always ready to follow your advice in anything."

"You are quite at liberty to do as you like," said Pramada. "I have nothing to say to you."

"I have always valued your advice, my dear. But let us drop the matter now. We shall talk it over another time."

CHAPTER XVI

NILKAMAL TELLS A STORY TO SHOW THAT ALL THINGS HAPPEN BY FATE

WE return to Bidhubhushan and Nilkamal. The reader must remember that we left them at a *mudi's* shop to proceed to the description of other things. There they passed that night. Early next morning they got up and resumed their journey. They travelled on in silence for some time ; and then fatigued they went and sat down under the shade of a tree off the way. Nilkamal looked rather sad, though he sang much and seemed very jolly the preceding night. Bidhubhushan had more than once felt inclined to talk to him on the way, but had abstained for fear Nilkamal would think of his favourite song again, of which he already had begun to tire. Now as they sat

smoking Bidhu asked, "What ails you, Nilkamal?"

Nilkamal said nothing; after a brief pause Bidhu repeated his query.

Without answering his question Nilkamal asked, "*Dadathakur*, (Nilkamal henceforth called Bidhu *dadathakur*) do Christian missionaries always do what they say?"

"What do Christian missionaries say, Nilkamal?"

"Is it a fact that whoever becomes a Christian has a *mem* given him for his wife?"

"I don't know, but if it be a fact, would you like to become a Christian?" said Bidhu with a laugh.

"If it is a fact, it is a great inducement I can tell you. But do you know the Samajmen have handsome young girls to give in marriage to those who enter their Samaj?"

"I don't know," said Bidhu.

"But I should like to marry a *mem* rather than a Brahma girl. *Mems* are very pretty indeed. I prefer the colour of their skin ; and then just think of their dress."

"Well," said Bidhu, "if you get a *mem* for your wife, how are you to support her ?"

"Ah, there's the difficulty. I have been thinking of that. But who knows but I may be able to make a fortune in a little time."

"Who knows indeed."

When they had sufficiently rested their feet, they rose and resumed their journey. Nilkamal again relapsed into a kind of moody silence. After a while, however, he very seriously said, "If I am destined to marry a *mem*, it must be so ; for all things happen by fate, you know. There is a pretty story about it. I will tell it to you."

“Once upon a time,” Nilkamal thus began at once, “there lived in a village a Brahmin, who had a wife and an only child, a boy. One night as he lay awake in bed, his wife and child being asleep near him, he thought he saw a rope hanging over just before his eyes. He minded it not, and changed his side and tried to fall asleep. But slumber came not to him, and opening his eyes, there he saw the rope again. This time it seemed to be a little nearer to the ground. ‘It must be the mice,’ he said to himself. But as he looked again, lo ! the rope turned into a snake ; and before the Brahmin could rouse his wife, the snake descended and bit the mother and child, who died instantaneously on the spot. The Brahmin stood amazed and horrified at this. He saw the snake glide away through an opening in the door, and followed it. At daybreak it took the form of a tiger and

sprang upon a peasant on the way. The tiger then changed itself into a bull and gored a boy to death. Soon after the bull assumed the form of an old man who was so bent with age that he could hardly walk. The Brahmin, who had observed all this, following fast at a little distance, now came forward, and throwing himself at the old man's feet, 'oh,' said he, 'do tell me who you are.' At first the old man would not tell him who he was, but as the Brahmin was persistent and would take no refusal, he said at last, 'I am *Karma-sutra*. Mine is to take the life of a man as he is fated to die.'—'Do tell me then,' said the Brahmin, 'how I am to die.' The old man positively refused to tell him that, but as the Brahmin would not quit hold of his feet until he was told what he wanted to know, he very reluctantly said, 'know then that you will be devoured by a crocodile.'

“When the Brahmin knew what he wanted to know, he felt it was no longer safe for him to live near the water. So on he went toward the east, intending to be as farther as he could from the river which flowed down his native village, to which he now no longer had any inducement to return, having lost those who were nearest and dearest to him on earth. After several days’ journey he passed the jurisdiction of one *raja* and entered that of another, where some one was kind enough to let him lodge at his house.

“Now, the *raja* of the country to which he came had no children. And the Brahmin went to him and asked his permission to do for him certain things, by which he could not fail of having a son born to him.

“The *raja* complied with his request. And in a year’s time, the *rani*, his wife, presented him with a boy as beautiful as the morning star.

“Now, the *raja* was so pleased that instead of dismissing the Brahmin with money, he wished him to stay, and he thankfully accepted his offer. When the little *rajputtra* was old enough to learn, he became his tutor. And when the Brahmin had taught him all he knew himself, in a reasonable time, the *rajputtra* would go and visit foreign lands and offered to take his tutor with him. The Brahmin agreed to accompany him, but said that he would not go near a river. Being asked why, he told the *rajputtra* the reason ; and the *rajputtra* laughed at it as altogether idle, though he said that he should be allowed to have his own way.

“The *rajputtra* accompanied by his tutor travelled over various foreign countries, and at last expressed his desire to go to the Ganges to bathe. The Brahmin of course refused to go with him ; but the *rajputtra* said, ‘why, sir, you are not going

to be seized by a crocodile on land, that's sure.' What could the Brahmin do? He felt it was useless to refuse any longer, and so he went.

"The *rajputtra* came to a town on the Ganges and took up a suitable house. Now there was a *yoga* at hand, and for two or three days men and women kept pouring in crowds from various places, far and near, to perform the sacred ceremony of ablution. And when the day came on which the *rajputtra* was to go to bathe, the Brahmin, on being asked, expressly refused to go with him. But at length the *rajputtra* persuaded him, saying that he could have no reason to be anxious for his safety, as he was not to enter the water, but only to keep on the landing and dictate the *mantras*. When they had reached the river side, the sight of numerous people bathing together emboldened the Brahmin to come down to the

landing and dictate the *mantras*. But as the *rajputtra* could not hear him for the hubbub, he bade him come near enough to him, saying that his men would stand around him with drawn swords. The Brahmin did as he was asked, when the attendants immediately formed a ring around him. But as he had done dictating the *mantras*, 'I am the same *Karmasutra*,' cried the *rajputtra*, and instantly changing himself into a crocodile dashed him down and carried him off at one bound."

"It is a strange story," said Bidhu when Nilkamal had ended. After a while they came to a shop on the way.

"Friend shopkeeper," said Nilkamal, stepping up, "did you lodge two Brahmas in your shop?"

"Why, what do you mean by asking that?" said Bidhu.

"I just want to ask those fellows that

question—the one that I asked you on the road.”

“Brahmins did you say, sir ?” said the *mudi*.

“No, Brahmas,” said Nilkamal.

“Brahmas ? That’s a queer name ; but I am sure there have been two Brahmins here.”

Nilkamal said no more. He looked rather disappointed. Bidhu was quite tired and proposed that they should pass that night there.

CHAPTER XVII

'CALCUTTA IS SUCH A DIRTY PLACE.'

NEXT morning at sunrise Bidhu and Nilkamal resumed their journey. They had travelled a long distance and were now near Calcutta. And as they went on, they were cheered by the prospect of quickly finding themselves in the great city where they were to try their fortune. Nilkamal had no idea of Calcutta and asked his companion what it was like.

"Very unlike anything you have ever seen to be sure. But what do you mean? Do you mean how large it is or what?"

"I should like to know enough to have some idea of the place," said Nilkamal. "What colour is the clay there?"

"Why, I should be sure it is the same as in your Ramnagar," said Bidhu, laughing aloud at this question.

"But they say that Calcutta is a very large town. I don't understand that."

"Well, that means that Calcutta is many times as big as your native village. There are big bazaars and countless shops and countless people there."

"Are there more people in Calcutta than are assembled in our *hât* on *hât* days?"

"O, infinitely more than you can have an idea of. Nowhere in this country are there more people than in Calcutta."

"Well, what days are *hât* days there?"

"*Hât*! No such thing in Calcutta. There every day, the people can get to buy whatever they want; for, as I have told you, there are shops out of number and of all descriptions. Besides in every part of the town there is a bazaar which is crowded with buyers every day."

"But I wonder where all these shops and bazaars have so many buyers from

every day. Our *hât* is not held every day. We buy only two days in the week."

"Be quiet now," said Bidhu. "You will see by and by where there are buyers from every day."

They went on in silence for some minutes, and then Nilkamal again wondering where there were such numbers of buyers from every day referred the question for solution to his companion.

"Don't prattle, Nilkamal," said Bidhu in a rather rebuking tone. "I will never more answer your queries, if you don't hold your tongue when I tell you."

There was silence again for good half an hour. When they were within a mile of Calcutta, seeing a number of people pass, Nilkamal could hardly resist the temptation to ask where these people might be going to and whether they were going to a *jattrâ*.

"Nonsense," said Bidhu. "Don't you see we are very near Calcutta?"

"Are these people then going to Calcutta?" inquired Nilkamal.

"Yes," said Bidhu rather dryly.

There was another long pause ; and it was not broken until they had entered the town and neared Syambazar.

"O, *dadathakur*, what's that there?" cried Nilkamal in astonishment, as his curious eye caught sight of a hackney coach that moved rapidly up towards them with a rattling noise.

"Have you never seen a horse carriage before?" said Bidhu with a laugh.

"Why, I have seen Rohimbox's carriage. I have seen many other carriages too."

"I don't mean a bullock cart. Have you never seen a horse carriage?"

"A horse carriage? Is that a horse carriage?"

"Why, have you never been to Krish-

nagar ? There are many horse carriages there."

"I should be sure there are, but I never knew that a horse carriage was different from a bullock carriage."

Thus talking they crossed the *khal* by the Syambazar bridge. Just then more carriages drove up, and wheeled quickly past them.

"Look ! look ! one, two, three," exclaimed Nilkamal in ecstasy.

Nilkamal's eyes wandered from the road and looked strangely about. Just then another coach drove up from behind, and was about to rush on him, when the driver, calling out to him to get out of the way, gave him a quick sharp cut with his whip. Smarting with the pain he looked behind as he uttered a loud scream, and ran to one side of the road.

"How awkward of you, Nilkamal !" cried Bidhu. "Why, man, you have had

a narrow escape. This is not your Ramnagar. Here you are like "to risk your life at every step, if you don't have your eyes about you."

Nilkamal had his skin cut in two places; and he was so afraid for his safety that he would stick close to his companion and not be separated from him for a moment. Bidhu, however, persuaded him out of it by making him clearly understand that it was not safe for them to walk side by side, but that he would do well to keep just behind and let him lead the way.

"Come on," said Bidhu, as Nilkamal stopped to look at a fine horse on the way, "and don't be strangely staring at one thing."

Though Bidhu had never come to Calcutta before, as he had more than once been to Krishnagar, nothing seemed strange or new to him.

"Nilkamal," said Bidhu, as they walked along, "let us go to Kalighat. It is a more quiet place ; and besides, I think, we ought first to visit it as a holy place, to which people come from every part of the country to pay their worship to the goddess."

"Let us go by all means," said Nilkamal, who still felt a smart from the cut he had got. "I have no wish to stop here. Calcutta is such a dirty place. There's in the air such a filthy odour every here and there. And in the street one must have his eyes about him, lest he should get a cut or be driven over." .

"Kalighat," said Bidhu, "is just to the south of Calcutta. We are to keep straight on in the direction we are going."

"There are such numbers of beggars there."

"Yes," said Bidhu. "And they are the most importunate sets of beggars."

“The *Kalibari*,” said Nilkamal, “is not such a safe place as one may think it. It is easy to get into it, but to get out of it again with a whole skin—there’s the rub.”

“No fear of that,” said Bidhu. “You are safe, while you are with me.”

CHAPTER XVIII

SEPARATION OF BIDHU AND NILKAMAL

BIDHU and Nilkamal went on and on toward the south, till they came to the bazaar at Bhowanipur. "This is *Kalighat*, I think," said Bidhu. "Will you just inquire, Nilkamal?"

"Where is the *Kalibari*, please?" Nilkamal asked a passer-by.

The man asked was a Dacca man, who was a rice merchant. It is not the way with a man of East Bengal to readily answer a question that one may ask in passing. Instead of obliging him by telling him directly what he wants to know, he is always sure to tire his patience with a number of questions which he has no business to ask.

"Where do you come from?" he questioned Nilkamal with an intonation such

as is peculiar to the people of East Bengal, without answering his question.

"Krishnagar," replied Nilkamal.

"Were you ever in Calcutta before?"

"I wouldn't ask you if I was."

"Whither are you going?"

"What impertinence is this!" exclaimed Bidhu who wanted patience, being greatly incommoded with heat and hunger and fatigue.

"Here is a nabob's grandson, I see," said the Dacca man being offended. "Why, you are such a good tempered fellow that I think I should walk all the way with you to show you the *Kalibari*. Help yourself as you best can. I won't help you."

"We don't care a straw for your help," said Bidhubhushan, as the Dacca man turned to pursue his way. "Come along, Nilkamal, we can find our way to the *Kalibari* for ourselves."

Walking a little distance, Bidhu thought it was foolish to be out of temper with any one in the road, when on looking before they noticed a Brahmin, with a garland of *java* hanging from his neck, and his forehead well besmeared with vermilion, coming apace towards them. They stopped for him to come up, and then Bidhu asked, "Would you kindly direct us to the *Kalibari*?"

"I am going there, my friend," said he, smiling, and taking hold of Bidhu's hand in a familiar way. "I shall be very glad to take you there." .

Bidhu thanked him kindly for his good-naturedly offering, as he thought, to be their guide.

The Brahmin was a *panda* of the *Kalibari*, which Bidhu soon afterwards discovered. He was very glad to have found what he had eagerly been on the lookout for. And now he walked along with them,

talking and laughing merrily like an old acquaintance.

When they got to Kalighat, Bidhu and Nilkamal went to bathe in the Adiganga. Nilkamal was filled with disgust at the sight of filth and refuse floating all over on its muddy waters. "I fail to see," said he, "why people like so much to bathe in it. The river down Hanskhali I should like better, for there one need have no fear of having one's feet stuck deep in the mire, and, except during the rains, the water is sufficiently clear at all seasons."—"Don't disparage it, Nilkamal," said Bidhu, as they both entered the water. "This holy river has helped numbers to go to heaven, and we may go to heaven as well, if only we have faith like them."

Like two agreeable companions they talked as they bathed, and then they went to pay their adoration to the goddess with the *panda* walking before to lead the way,

who had never left them for a minute. Nilkamal was not very pleased on seeing the temple ; and great indeed was his disappointment when he looked upon the idol itself. "I will swear," said he, "the man who fashioned it did not at all understand his business." He was about to make other remarks, but just then Bidhu said, "Hush, Nilkamal ! spare your criticisms now ; you have enough to do to mind what you are about."

However, when they had paid their worship, Bidhu and Nilkamal were coming away, when they were stopped at the door by a lean sinister-looking Brahmin demanding to be paid his due.

"What to pay ?" Bidhu asked.

"The least to pay is eight annas, but if you can pay more, so much the better for you and for us too."

Bidhu untied the string of his purse secured about his waist, and taking out a

four anna bit put it into the fellow's hand.

Nilkamal was coming away without paying anything, and when he was stopped, he readily answered that he was but the servant of the babu, upon which he was allowed to pass.

They had scarcely gone fifty steps from the door of the temple, when they were stopped again by the *panda*, who now stretched out his hand, demanding to be paid in his turn.

"I have paid at the door," said Bidhu.
"Why should I pay again?"

"I have nothing to do with that. Where is my reward for the service I have done you?"

Without another word Bidhu took out another four anna ~~bit~~, and had just put it into the man's hand, when some fifty persons, men and women, with clusters of garlands in their hands, made a rush

toward them. Before they knew it, they came quickly around them, so as to effectually cut off their escape. Then in a moment they rushed to put garlands on their necks and to daub their foreheads with vermilion. And the rabble pressed so close around and upon them, making vociferous demands and uttering loud benedictions that they found it hard work to get away. Whichever way they attempted to move they were pulled from the opposite side ; and the clamour and confusion were such indeed that one who has never been there can scarcely picture the scene to himself.

Bidhu was soon quite tired with them ; and wanting to be rid of them anyhow, he felt for his purse ; but to his great surprise, he found it was missing. In deep distress he cried to his companion, "I have been robbed, Nilkamal, oh ! I have been robbed of my money."

Nilkamal, too intent on how he could best make his escape to hear him properly, cried, "Help, help, *dadathakur*, I will swear these fellows will be the death of me."

In fact Nilkamal was in a more woful situation than Bidhu. He had his face so daubed with vermilion that he could hardly be known again. For though every one wanted to get at his forehead, there were many who missed it, and thus he received the colour in every possible part of his face. Some one chanced to run his finger into one of his eyes, which nearly blinded him. He was heavily loaded on with garlands. With loud appeals to their mercy he begged the people to desist from their mad course and let him go, as he had not so much as a pice about him.

With great difficulty did Bidhu and Nilkamal at last succeed in getting away. On gaining the street they met, on looking

around, an upcountryman in just the same predicament as they had been in. Pointing behind with looks which bespoke terror, Nilkamal cried, "O *dadathakur*, there they come again. I will not stop one moment here." And he took to his heels, leaving his companion to shift for himself as he best could. But just as he ran off, a hue and cry was at once raised after him. A number of men chased him with the cry of "stop the man." Nilkamal ran as if for his life ; and as he scudded away at such rapid pace, more and more men echoed the cry and joined in the pursuit. But his legs soon failed him. He had walked for three whole days and had eaten nothing since that morning. As he came to a turn in the street, he was quite exhausted, and his legs giving way, down he came to the ground. Soon his pursuers were around him ; but not one of them knew why he had run after him.

Nilkamal was like a desperate man now. "Come," he cried, "put your whole loads of garland on me. I have nearly lost one eye, and I don't care at all if I lose the other." At these words, which seemed to have no meaning, the men took him for a mad man and went away laughing.

Nilkamal's eye was very painful now, and the water flowed from it. Besides he had his skin cut and torn in more places than one on account of the bad tumble he had got. He sat there for a while ; and then rising to his feet and dusting himself he turned to come to Bidhu. But he soon found that he had lost his way. For all that evening he tried in vain to find his way back to the *Kalibari* ; and at length got so tired that his legs could carry him no longer. Dragging himself up he sank down at the door of a house. And as he sat there and thought of his own forlorn condition, he wept like a child.

"Who are you ?" asked a voice when he had sat there for a good half hour. The voice that inquired was the voice of the master of the house, who, seeing a strange man at the door just on his return from office, stopped to make an inquiry before entering.

"I am Nilkamal," said Nilkamal, crying and sobbing like a child.

"Why do you cry ?" asked the master of the house.

"I have lost my way," said Nilkamal, still crying like a child.

"Lost your way ? How is that ?"

Nilkamal now ceased weeping, and brushing away his tears gave an account of himself.

The babu took compassion on him, and entering received ~~him~~ kindly into the house.

"Wait here," said he, showing him into a room, "till I bring you something to eat."

After he had eaten something Nilkamal felt much refreshed ; and then he longed to tell the master of the house, as he thought it would greatly please him, that he could play well on the *behala*.

“Will you then just give us some proof of your skill ?” said the babu when he knew that he was a good player on the *behala*.

Nilkamal at once took up his *behala*, but just as he removed the rag, in which it had been carefully wrapped, he suddenly exclaimed in a tone of deep regret, “What do I see ! my *behala* gone, and thus I am deprived of the only solace and comfort of my life !” As he uttered these words, he shed a flood of tears, for indeed he was pained beyond all measure to find his *behala* broken in two or three places so as to be utterly useless.

The babu did really sympathise with him in his grief, and kindly promised him a new *behala*.

This somewhat comforted Nilkamal. "I am very thankful, sir," said he ; "but I am sure I can never get a *behala* like the one I have lost."

The babu, however, said, "You can go with me to the bazaar, Nilkamal, and choose one for yourself." After a while Nilkamal was called to supper. He was afterwards very kindly supplied with a bed to sleep on ; and as he stood most in need of rest that night, he went to bed and quickly fell asleep.

To return to Bidhubhushan. The loss of his purse weighed heavily upon his heart. He was amazed and almost horrified to see poor Nilkamal hunted by a number of men on the road, and for no earthly reason that could be known. He wished he had not come there, and was sorry he had done so. Through grief and hunger and fatigue he lost all heart and burst into tears. And as he turned his

weary steps in the direction of the river he met the very *panda* who had been his guide, and asked him where he might be supplied with food and shelter for the night. "You need not be troubled about that," said he. "Come on with me to the *Kalibari*, and I will get you *prosad*." Bidhu followed him thither; and there he waited for the *prosad*, till it was ready for distribution among the people. After he had partaken of it, he went and laid him down in one corner of the temple to sleep.

Early next morning Bidhu rose and went to bathe. He afterwards went and waited in the corner where he had slept during the past night. He never exchanged a word with anybody, and nobody cared to look at him, much less to talk to him. He, however, got tired of waiting and went to take a turn in the street. He knew the hour for the distribution of the

prosad ; and when it came, he went and had his share of it. Thus he lived on from day to day.

CHAPTER XIX

BIPRADAS'S WILL.

It was just as Hem had predicted about his sister. By diligent application and perseverance, while her brother was away, Svarnalata soon made a fair progress in reading and writing, and at length wrote a letter to her brother. Her brother was mightily glad to peruse her letter. It was short and simple, and so full of love. In this he was lovingly reminded of his promise. And so when he went home, he handed his sister with a smile a beautiful flower of gold of delicate workmanship for use on her *khonpa*, and she was delighted with her prize. "I am so glad you have won the prize," he said, putting it on for her, and looking as though he was very proud to think that she was so gentle and loving and intelligent.

Bipradas was out on some business

when his son came home. But as Hem was expected, he quickly returned after finishing his business. Hearing his son's voice as he entered, he went in full of joy. Svarna ran to her father as soon as she saw him. "I have got a prize from brother, papa," said Svarna, showing her father the flower of gold. "Look, how fine it is."

Bipradas said nothing. He was perfectly happy in his children. And now he was moved to tears at the grateful thought that they were so loving and good. A tear also started to 'Svarna's' eye, as she looked up to her father's face. Hem stood by with his eyes looking down on the ground, respecting this outburst of parental love, which now found its vent in tears.

After some minutes' silence Bipradas entered into conversation with his son and talked till dinner time.

Hem assisted his sister with her lessons as before, and so rapid indeed was her progress that her brother was astonished. Now and then they read interesting stories to each other. Their father, resting in bed, often watched them reading or talking together, with feelings of mingled love and gratitude.

The holidays were quickly at an end, and Hem must be gone.

"I will go down to Calcutta with you," said Bipradas to his son.

"Why, father?" asked Hem, looking very pleased. •

"O, I have some business with a lawyer, my love. But, why, I may tell you that I am going to make a will."

"A will, father?"

"Yes, a will, my son. I am now in the decline of my life and must think of disposing of my property."

At first Hem was glad his father was

going to accompany him, but when he knew, why, in an instant his cheerfulness left him. He looked so sad ; and his father said, "Don't be concerned about my going to make a will."

At these words Hem burst into tears. "Come, come," said Bipradas, "why should you thus make yourself miserable, my son ? No one need die, because he must make his will. One may make a will, and change it as many times as he wants to. Who knows but I may have many years of life yet before me."

Hem brushed away the tears from his eyes. On the appointed day he left for Calcutta with his father.

A day or two after his arrival in Calcutta Bipradas went and took a *ghari* to proceed to Bhowanipur; to see a friend, a lawyer, who belonged to their village. He soon arrived in his lodging, and Babu Benoy Krishna Ghose, for that was the

gentleman's name, gave him a most cordial reception. The two conversed together for a while, and then Bipradas said, "I am an old man now and must think of making my will."

"Why, I think that's good," said Benoy Babu. "I can draft it and have it copied just when you please. But how do you wish to divide your money?"

"What I have got I mean to divide equally between my two children."

"Will that not be an injustice to your son? Hem is not going to get a share of the property of the husband of his sister when she is married."

"Of course, he is not. But he may live to make a fortune; he may be very prosperous in life. My father, you know, left me nothing. And Svarna—she may be married to a poor man's son, no one knows."

"But how much have you got?"

"That you will know when you draft the will," said Bipradas with a smile.

Bipradas was not to make any long stay that day, so he bade his friend good-bye and returned to his lodgings. In a few days he again called on him. The will was drawn up and written out on stamped paper. To each of the children was allotted the sum of fifteen thousand rupees in promissory notes. When Hem had attained to his majority, and Svarna had been given away in marriage, they would be entitled to the benefit of the will.

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CHAPTER XX

GADADHAR AND SYAMA

THOUGH Gadadhar spoke not a word about the disgrace he had been in at the *thana*, he secretly meditated revenge on Syama and Sarala. Pramada also watched for an opportunity to make them pay dearly for their insolence. She was not to timidly pocket the insult like her husband, but she would bring down the pride of the maid-servant, though neither herself nor her brother, it must be said, had the courage to attack her openly.

One night Sarala and Syama, after they had taken their food, were in bed talking, and the door was on the jar. It was near midnight ; and Pramada, choosing her time, walked lightly to the old house in which her sister-in-law lived ; then creeping on tiptoe, as she looked cautiously about her, she reached the door of Sarala's

bed-room and stood listening attentively to the chat that was going on.

"It is nearly three months since your master left home," said Sarala. "It is strange he hasn't sent a line to say how he is doing."

"You needn't be anxious, dear *kakima*," said Syama. "We are not sure he has been staying in the same place these three months. Perhaps he has got an engagement under a *jattrawalla*. Perhaps he has been waiting for an opportunity to write, and now it may be we shall soon hear from him. One cannot write, you know, unless one has sufficient composure of mind for that purpose."

"I think we haven't much left of our small sum," said Sarala.

"What we have left," said Syama, "is likely to support us for six months yet."

"But I don't like your keeping the money in that chest, as it wants a key."

“Why, who will know it wants a key?” said Syama. “You may be sure it is as safe there as if we kept it under lock and key.”

Pramada had no need to hear any more ; so she immediately slunk away. She chuckled over the discovery she had made. She thought she would steal the money that same night. Should she be caught in the act? She thought she had better not do anything hastily, but consult her mother first.

The next morning, when her husband was gone to *kachari*, Pramada told her mother of the important discovery she had made. “Leave it to me, sister,” exclaimed Gadadhar, “and I should be sure to manage it as cleverly as you could wish it.”

“Softly, softly, Gadadharchandra,” said his mother. Then looking around, and speaking as if the very walls had ears,

she said, "Three or four days I have seen them go to bed with the door open. But take care how you put in your nose, my boy, if you find that Syama is awake. You must know well the risk you run."

"You need fear nothing, mother," said Gadadhar. "I will take the precaution to smear myself with oil ; and if that ugly hated woman should seize me, why, she can't keep hold of me, that's certain."

"Hush !" said Pramada who was at the door, watching, seeing Syama at a distance. As Syama came within hearing, she cried to Gadadhar, "You are going home now ?" — "No, not now, I am going in the evening," cried Gadadhar, taking the hint.

A little before sunset Gadadhar made the announcement that he was going home, and having dressed left the house. At about 11 'o clock at night he returned. Walking round he slipped into the old house by the backdoor which wanted a latch.

It was the middle of summer. The moon was in the sky. There was not a breath of wind, for the night was hot and sultry. Sarala and Syama had gone to bed, leaving the door open. Between them Gopal was sleeping quietly. Gadadhar waited till it was all still ; then knowing his opportunity he slily entered the room, and having stolen the money, made off with it.

He hurried on and did not stop until he reached his house. The next morning he returned to his sister. On the way he wondered if they had missed the money. He was glad when he found that they had not. That day as Sarala had no occasion for any money, there was no occasion for opening the chest, and hence the money was not missed.

Next day going to *pathshala* Gopal asked his mother for his *pathshala* 'ee, telling her how his *gurumohashoy* had bid him take care not to forget it. Sarala was

busy cooking at the time, so she called to Syama and asked her to let Gopal have his *pathshala* fee. On opening the chest, Syama, missing the money where it used to be kept, thought that Sarala was joking, having put the money elsewhere.

"Why, now, this is a good joke indeed," cried Syama. "Come, tell me, *kakima*, where you have kept the money."

"O Syama, what do you mean?" exclaimed Sarala with surprise.

"I mean what I say," said Syama rather jocundly. "Now leave off joking, *kakima*, and don't let us keep Gopal waiting for nothing."

"Oh, I am not joking, Syama. I haven't meddled with the chest these two or three days, but you surprise me."

Her looks and manner of speaking plainly showed that she was really serious. It seemed certain that the money was gone. They, however, both searched for

it in the chest and all over the room, but it was nowhere to be found. In deep despair Sarala sank down on the floor. "Oh ! what shall we do now !" she cried.

"As sure as I live," exclaimed Syama, "it is that cursed rascal of a Brahmin who has stolen the money. Now I see why he suddenly went home the other day. It was only to avoid suspicion. Surely that very day he returned and stole the money. I remember they were talking together rather guardedly the other day, and when I came near enough to them, they began to speak aloud just that I mightn't suspect anything. I will go to the police." And Syama bustled out of the room.

For two days Pramada and her mother and brother had been watching and waiting to hear a *gūlmal*, and now they heard it, they laughed in their sleeve and very much enjoyed the trouble they were in.

"Gadadhar has stolen our money," cried Syama, stopping, as she heard whispers in Pramada's room. "Let him produce the money, I say, or I will call in the police."

"Charge me with theft, you insolent hussy!" cried Gadadhar, getting out. "I will go to the police. I will bring you down."

"Not you," cried Syama. "Didn't you go to the police the other day? Didn't you?"

Gadadhar thought at once that Syama had heard of the disgrace he had been in at the *thana*, and retreated crestfallen.

As he re-entered his sister's room, Syama continued, "Yes, you did; and what then? The police found you to be an idiot and sent you away. I will go and inform the police, and I will not spare your accomplices." Upon this Syama bustled out of the house. She had not gone far, when Shashibhushan, meeting

her on his way home from *kachari*, and suspecting by her looks that there was something wrong, inquired, "What's the matter now, Syama?"

"Gadadhar has stolen our money," said Syama, as she stopped, "and I am going to the *thana*."

"There is no haste," said Shashibhushan. "You must let me inquire into the matter before you go to the *thana*. Now follow me."

Syama obeyed. When Shashibhushan had heard all from her, he made no remarks, but only put a rupee into her hand, saying, "You can pay Gopal's *pathshala* fee out of this money now, but I must further inquire into the matter."

After eating his meal, Shashibhushan talked with his wife for some time and grew very suspicious. But he dared not say anything to her for fear of giving offence. When he was ready for *kachari*

again, he called Syama and said, "There is no very strong evidence against Gadadhar ; but I will pay the money rather than you should make a fuss by calling in the police."

On his return from *kachari*, Shashibhusan called Syama again and counted out the money to her.

CHAPTER XXI

GOPAL FINDS A MOTHER IN A COMPANION'S MOTHER

In the mornings and in the afternoons Gopal attended his *pathshala* at the house of Ram Chandra Ghose. This gentleman, who lived a little way off from Bidhubhushan's house, had allowed the use of his *Chundimandav* for the instruction of the little boys of the village. There were some sixty boys on the roll ; and as they all squatted on the floor, each on his little square mat, noisily engaged in writing and ciphering, according to their different progress, on palm leaves, plantain leaf and paper, the *gurumohashoy*, the prominent figure in the whole group, was seated in the midst of them, and now and then struck the rod on the floor as he thundered, "Louder, boys, louder."

The boys, for the most part, were often

at their loudest. Such as wrote on palm leaves used bamboo pens. And they wrote, often making blots, and wiping out the ink with their fingers, rubbing the fingers on their heads or on their *dhutis*. There were others, little fellows newly initiated into the mysteries of reading and writing, wallowing in blots and daubing themselves with ink up to the very roots of their hair. If any one of these by accident formed a letter properly, he immediately smeared it out again with his arm in his preparations to make another. The writers on plantain leaf, who were more advanced, worked at arithmetic or spelt proper names with a drawling and half nasal sound as they wrote them. But the most advanced were the writers on paper, who wrote a bold hand and solved difficult problems in arithmetic. They wrote with reed pens, and they kept up a sort of humming noise as they copied,

each with an eye to neatness, forms of *pattas* and *kabuliats* and contracts, the paper used by them being generally very rough and such as could be had at a very cheap price. The *gurumohashoy*, who was a hard smoker, was generally believed to be more fond of caning than teaching his pupils.

“Why are you so late ?” demanded the *gurumohashoy* in a voice like thunder, which made the boys at once start and look up to see who had come in, as one day a boy whose name was Nidhiram, showed himself in *pathshala* at a somewhat late hour, carrying his mat in a long roll under his arm, with the palm leaves sticking out at one end, and his ink-pot suspended from strings.

“Come up, you little rogue,” was the command of the formidable village preceptor as he took up the rod at the same instant.

The *gurumohashoy* was not to be disobeyed. Slowly and timidly the poor boy moved up and stood before the judgment seat.

"You dog ! do you choose this hour for coming to *pathshala* ?" said the *gurumohashoy*, shaking the rod as he rose from his seat.

"Please, sir," said Nidhiram who trembled visibly as he expected the rod to descend on his head every moment, "I have been preparing the tobacco father brought from market this morning, as I wished to take you some of it."

"Oh, then I must test your tobacco," said the *gurumohashoy*, resuming his seat and handing his *chilum* to Nidhiram. "Now, fill it. If I like your tobacco I may spare the rod, but if I do not, I will make it fly in pieces on your back."

Coming away to do his bidding Nidhiram stopped, leaving first his bundle of

palm leaves and his ink-pot in his usual place, to draw a long luxurious breath of relief. When the *chilum* was got ready, he gave two or three pulls on the sly, relishing them as one newly initiated into smoking would do, and then returned to his *gurumohashoy* never doubting but he would approve the tobacco.

Unfortunately for Nidhiram, however, the tobacco proved not to his liking, and as the poor boy was going to sit down quietly in his place, the *gurumohashoy* cried, "So you have brought this worthless tobacco for me ? Come up, you puppy."

Nidhiram's stars were evidently now against him. The poor boy, however, approached the dreaded seat, and stood pleading that he was not to blame, as it was not he but his father who had brought the tobacco ; but the *gurumohashoy* would not listen to reason, and quickly enough saved him the trouble of proving his inno-

cence by inflicting five or six cuts on the head and back of the boy, which sent him smarting and yelling back to his seat.

Having flogged Nidhiram, the *gurumohashoy* assumed a look of imperturbable gravity. "Now, boys, come, bring up your *parvan* one by one," he cried, looking around with an air of great dignity.

After the celebration of each festival in the almanac, each boy was to pay his *parvan*, that is one pice as his mite of contribution for the benefit of the *gurumohashoy*. If any defaulters pleaded as their excuse that their guardians would not pay it, they were taught to get it by theft. The boys, in short, would do anything to please their *gurumohashoy*.

Those who had brought their *parvan* went up and paid it one after the other.

"Your *parvan*, sir?" the *gurumohashoy* asked Gopal in a somewhat stern voice.

"Please, sir," said Gopal, "I will bring it to-morrow."

"Didn't you say that yesterday?"

"Yes, sir, but I quite forgot it."

"Then, it seems, you must have a taste of the rod to make you remember it."

Gopal knew that his mother was not able to pay, yet his horrid dread of flogging made him say that he would bring it without fail "to-morrow," upon which he was let go with the warning, "Take care you don't forget again."

At the end of *pathshala* hours, Gopal, coming home with a boy, named Bhuban, said, "Bhuban, would you please lend me a pice? I have promised to pay to-morrow, and if I fail, you know what I am to expect to get." And the poor boy shuddered at the very thought of it.

"Why not get it from your mother?" said Bhuban.

"If mother could pay, I wouldn't want to borrow from you."

"Then you can pay out of your *jalkhabar* money."

"Oh, I get nothing of the sort."

"You don't eat your *khabar*?"

"No."

"What do you take after going home from *pathshala*? What do you eat to-day? You must be very hungry now."

"I don't know. If there be anything, mother will let me have it. But I often go without *khabar* and I don't mind it."

Bhuban was pained to hear his companion talk thus, and he said again, "You never ask your mother for *khabar*?"

"No, I mustn't, for then I should only distress her, and I would suffer anything rather than grieve my mother's heart. Oh, my poor mother! I cannot bear to see her weep. One day Bepin and I went home together. Bepin had his *khabar* ;

mother had nothing to give me ; so she sat down and wept as though her heart would break. After that I never could like to walk home with Bepin. I always like to wait and linger by the way just to let Bepin have time to get home before me and eat his *khabar*, and then I go home and play with him." And the poor boy quickly drew his hand across his eyes.

"Bepin never likes to share his *khabar* with you ?" said Bhuban now greatly sympathising with his companion.

"Bepin is willing, but aunt will not allow it. She makes him eat his *khabar* in her presence."

"Do please walk home with me. I will share my *khabar* with you, and then I can get you a pice from mother."

"No, don't ask your mother. You can lend it yourself if you like."

"All right, come along."

The two boys walked on in silence ;

and as soon as Bhuban got home, he went and told his mother all about Gopal.

The good mother at once stepped out with her son, and noticing the sad look of Gopal, took him by both hands and said, "My child, you have come together from *pathshala*, and *you* are waiting at the door!" She led him in with great kindness, and, making him sit down, gave him and her boy some sweetmeats, and water in two small *ghatis*.

Having done eating, Gopal drank off the water and asked for a little more, as he held out the empty *ghati*.

"Whom do you ask, child?" said Bhuban's mother.

Gopal modestly replied that he meant her, upon which she said with a smile, "Tell me who I am."

He blushed and hung down his head.

"I will not hear you," she said, "unless you say, 'ma, give me a little water.'"

Gopal's lip quivered with emotion as he repeated the words in a rather hoarse voice.

Bhuban's mother at once took him up in her arms, and, having kissed his forehead, gave him some water. For a while Gopal could see nothing for his tears. Resting his head on her shoulder, he closed his eyes and kept quite still. Tears were also in the eyes of Bhuban's mother. They fell plentifully and even wet Gopal's arms.

· *You* also are a mother, Pramada !

For a long time she held him in her arms ; then setting him down, and taking his both hands in hers, she said, "Will you promise, Gopal, to see me every day on your way home from *pathshala* ?"

Gopal very humbly saying that he would do as she wished him, she pressed a rupee into his hand and said, "Go and play now, my child ; but let me see you once again before you go home."

CHAPTER XXII

NILKAMAL AT A *JATTRA*.

NILKAMAL was allowed to stay at the gentleman's house at Kalighat, where he earned his meals by making himself sufficiently useful in the house. The babu had kindly bought him a new *behala* ; and on it Nilkamal screeched in his leisure time regularly after mid-day. Whenever any one inquired of the babu about Nilkamal, before the babu could reply, Nilkamal would readily say that he was a *kaloat*, at which the babu would only smile, as indeed he was greatly benefited by such drudgery as he underwent in the house.

Nilkamal often inquired of hawkers passing by the door if there was to be a *jattra* anywhere. No hawker, once asked, would pay heed to his words again. Nilkamal thought that the hawkers who

went to every house ought to know better. Weeks passed, and he could get no information of a *jattrā*. He wanted so much to be at one that he could think of nothing else, and he often dreamed or talked of it in sleep at night. Much as he wished to go about for the information he so earnestly desired, he dared not leave the house for fear of losing his way.

One morning Nilkamal was smoking his *huka*, when the babu called, "Nilkamal, Nilkamal."

Nilkamal then was quite lost in the thought that was constantly uppermost in his mind, and consequently did not hear the babu.

The babu walked up to his room and called again. Nilkamal turned with a start, and, seeing that the babu had on his walking suit, inquired, "Where are you going, sir?"

"Going to a *jattrā*. I hear you want

very much to be at one, and I wish you to go with me."

Nilkamal eagerly clutched at the proposal. Assuring the babu that he felt very thankful, he put away his *huka* and *chilum*, and was ready in a minute to follow him out of the house.

"Where is this *jattrā*?" Nilkamal asked, as leaving his house the babu took the road leading to the *kalibari*.

"A little way off, near the *kalibari*."

"Very close to the *kalibari* do you say, sir?"

"Yes," was the reply.

"Then I am not going, sir," said Nilkamal in a rather decided tone.

"Not going? Why not?" asked the babu.

"Because I have no eyes of stone in my head, sir."

"Well, what do you mean by that?"

Nilkamal briefly related his troubles in

and out of the *kalibari*, and concluded by saying that he wished his eyes had been made of stone instead of flesh, as then he would be nothing afraid.

"But I assure you" said the babu, laughing, "you are quite safe while you are with me."

"Why, hadn't I the same assurance from *dadathakur*?"

"Your *dadathakur*, like yourself, being fresh from the country has as much need of help himself as you have. But I assure you, you are quite safe to go with me."

Nilkamal, as the reader can easily think, did not require much persuasion to go. On finding himself in the house where the *jattr*a was going on, he was struck with admiration at the dazzling splendour of the chandeliers suspended over from strings, in which here and there a few flickering lights were still allowed to burn,

shedding a pale lustre around. His eyes were now never at rest. Now they looked on the swarming crowds around, now on the *jattrawallas*, and at other times wandered among the pictures, with which the walls and pillars were decorated. He bored the babu with no end of questions, to the great disturbance of the others near him.

After waiting about an hour and a half, the babu said to Nilkamal, "I want to be going now. Do you?"

"No," said Nilkamal, "I mean to wait till the end."

"Just as you please," said the babu. "I cannot wait any longer, as it is getting late, and I have to attend office."

With these words the babu was about to leave when he turned round and said to Nilkamal, "Do you think you can find your way back?"

"If I cannot, I can ask," said Nilkamal.

"What ask ?"

"Ask, 'where is the babu's house ?'"

"What babu ?"

"Why, the babu who goes to office."

"Nonsense," said the babu, laughing.

"How is any one to know whom you mean unless you name the person you mean ?"

"What to ask then ?"

"Ask to be directed to Rameswara Babu's house."

"Rameswara ?"

"Yes, that's my name," said the babu.

"Now, don't forget it."

When the babu had said that, he left him ; and Nilkamal tried hard to remember his name, going over it again and again till he had mastered his lesson. He next wanted to know the name of the *audhicari* or head of the *jattr*a company, and asked one who stood right before with his back turned towards him. Failing, however, to draw his attention, he gave

him a squeeze such as made him at once turn round in pain, as he cried, "Who is that?"

"I was wanting to know the name of the *audhicari*," said Nilkamal.

"What needed that savage squeeze to ask that?" said the man angrily.

"Have I hurt you? You can give me a squeeze if you like. But I meant you no harm, I can tell you."

Just at this time an upcountryman stood up and bade all noise be hushed.

Nilkamal now dared not ask any one else. He looked anxiously around when two men rose to leave, and as they passed by him, one said to the other, "Govinda Audhicari has lost the charm of his name." As Nilkamal heard that remark he thought within himself, "Ah! my old friend, Govinda Audhicari. Right glad chance has once more thrown me into his way. I will watch him, and if by any chance his

eyes meet mine, I shall be sure to give him a nod of recognition, and he will be sure to sign to me to come up. The fellow here, who was just now put in a passion with me, will then know what I am worth." Nilkamal watched Govinda Audhicari long enough till, tired, he turned and twisted and hawked and caughed so as to attract his attention, and would have continued that operation for sometime, but just then the play broke up, and then there was a rush of crowds getting out. Nilkamal now went up and took his seat among the players.

CHAPTER XXIII

BIDHUBHUSHAN JOINS A COMPANY OF PANCHALI WALLAS.

AFTER a few days' stay at Kalighat Bidhubhushan's mind was made up to seek employment under a *jattrawalla*. But Fortune, it seemed, was resolved to make him unhappy. For though he tried hard to secure some such engagement, he had nothing but disappointment for his pains. He continued to have his meals as before, but his clothes were now so dirty that he felt shame to go out in them. His friend, the *panda*, would have him follow his occupation, but he could not like it, for he wanted to do something by which he could honestly get his living.

One day as Bidhubhushan was alone with his melancholy thoughts, he said to himself, "What a hard life to live ! hard enough to try, not infrequently, the best

of us. My health is impaired, my spirits are damped by disappointment. And these dirty rags—do they not speak against me and make me perhaps as worthless as a beggar in the eyes of one who never had to feel the pinch of hunger? But what has become of poor Nilkamal? How strange was the circumstance that caused our separation! Poor Sarala! had she been married to another she might have been comfortable.” The thought of his wife moved him deeply; tears rolled down his face. But soon his looks changed to a terrific scowl as the thought of his brother and sister-in-law crossed his mind. His lips were compressed, his hands clenched with spasmodic violence. His face, however, relaxed as he thought again of Gadadhar and his mother, and then there came a smile on his lips.

The face is the mirror in which are

reflected any feelings that are roused in the heart.

Bidhubhushan was so deep in his own thoughts that he did not notice that there was one by whose eyes were looking on him. This man was no other than his *panda* friend. "You are going to run mad !" he said, walking up to Bidhubhushan, when he had observed in his face alternate expressions of grief, anger and pleasure in a little time.

Bidhubhushan turned with a start. "What ?" he said.

"I am going to a *panchali*, and I wish you would accompany me."

Bidhubhushan was quickly ready. As they walked together, his *panda* friend said, "You want to join a *jattr* company ?"

"Yes ; but it is so hard to get anything, and that makes me feel so miserable, you know."

"I tell you what," said his friend. "There is a company of *panchaliwallas* down here from our village. They are going to give a public performance to-night. Why, man, here is an opportunity. Don't miss it, that's all I can tell you."

"Miss the opportunity? Not I. But tell me more about it."

"Well, I saw the head of the company this morning. He belongs to our village. He wants a man who can play well on the *dhole*. I spoke to him about you. If he likes you, he will be glad to have you as a partner. 'Bring him over as soon as possible,' were his very words to me when I told him on leaving that you would turn out just the man he would like to have. Now, don't miss this opportunity."

Bidhubhushan wanted words to express his gratitude. His looks, however, told what he could not speak out. They soon

saw the head of the company, and the *panda* introduced his friend, saying, "Here is the man I spoke to you about."

Bidhubhushan's clothes were so dirty that at first the headman looked as though he would have nothing to do with him. But presently he put on a pleasant face, and said, as he reached him a *dhole*, "Let us see how you will do." Bidhubhushan played, and to the best of his ability. The headman was well pleased with his performance ; but he was rather cautious in expressing his opinion, and only said, looking very grave, "I think you will do." He next turned to the *panda* and said, "He accepts our terms ?"

"Yes," said the *panda*, "he is willing to join as a partner."

"Well, when are you going to join ?" the headman asked Bidhubhushan.

"Just when you please," said Bidhubhushan.

"Why not now, if it suits you? The sooner the better."

"I am always ready," said Bidhubhushan.

Shortly after Bidhubhushan had joined, fortune began to smile on the company. Even after two or three public performances the *panchaliwallas* began everywhere and there to be talked of very highly, and thus they were speedily put on the way of making plenty of money and winning a name for themselves. Their fame soon spread far and wide. Bidhubhushan now was a different man from what he had been very recently. His clothes were clean and good, and he had got back his former health and activity. Over and above he had grown to be very much liked and even respected among his fellow *panchaliwallas*. But for all that his heart often yearned toward home. How keenly at times he felt the separation of his wife and boy. Nothing now of the child in him.

How much older he looked than his age. How sober he had grown since for the first time he began the battle of life for himself. To-day is a young man as gay as a butterfly, caring for nothing but pleasure, to-morrow he may be sobered down by some unforeseen incident over which he has no control. Bidhubhushān had had troubles which had moulded him anew.

As soon as Bidhubhushan got his share of the first night's profits after he had joined, he sent a letter and some money to his wife. As he never had taken any pains to write well, he squandered a deal of paper before he could bring forth a letter he could like. The first letter he had produced he rejected because it was not neat enough. The second also he rejected because he did not like the wording of it ; and the third he spoiled altogether by spilling the ink on it. The last one to

which no accident had happened he approved. He read it from beginning to end. How delighted his wife would be to receive his letter. His eyes filled with tears as he thought of it.

Bidhu then proceeded to get the letter duly registered and posted. After that with what eagerness he awaited a letter from his wife ! He daily visited the Post Office in the hope of hearing from home. But when more than a week had passed, and there was no letter from his wife, he began to be very uneasy. It suddenly occurred to his mind that his wife did not know how to write, but he thought again that his own boy might, by this time, have learnt to write tolerably well.

This thought supported him. He would rather live in hope than die in despair. He persistently continued his visits till one day the Post Master said to him, "We have had the receipt at last."

"Have you?" eagerly inquired Bidhubhushan.

The Post Master showed him the receipt. In distinct letters there was the name Gopal Chandra Chatterjee.

For a while Bidhubhushan looked on the signature with a deep and affectionate interest. He then asked the Post Master if he could kindly part with that bit of paper.

"I am sorry I cannot, sir," said he. "This receipt is meant to be kept in the office."

Bidhubhushan's eyes were once more bent upon the signature. And when he was obliged to take them off, his heart was full and he quickly brushed away the moisture from his eyes. He, however, felt easy when he left, saying good-bye to the Post Master.

REUNION OF BIDHUBHUSHAN AND NILKAMAL.

THERE was a large programme of entertainments at a *baroari-puja* at Devipur, a village in the district of Hugli. From 5 o'clock in the afternoon till 10 o'clock at night there was the *panchali*. The songs were well sung, but what elicited the loudest applause from all was the performance of the one who played on the *dhole*.

The *dhole*-man was Bidhubhushan who now was the head of the company of *panchaliwallas*.

Next there was the *jattr*a which commenced a little after mid-night. There was a large audience. Early in the morning Bidhubhushan and his brother *panchaliwallas* went to hear the *jattr*a. They had just arrived when there struck

up the music preliminary to the appearance of a comic character. As the music stopped, a little fellow in a satin *chapkan* and *pyjamas* of chintz stood up and exclaimed, "*Bachha*, Hanuman, where are you now ? Oh ! come and help me." He personated Rama ; and he was thin, and looked very pale and seemed so tired now. When he had uttered those words, all noise was hushed into silence, and every one was on the tiptoe of expectation to see Hanuman appear. Hanuman, however, not making his appearance, Rama called again and again till he was hoarse, but the former seemed inexorable. Poor Rama ! he was badly in need of rest. But he must have his Hanuman's aid. Without him the fight could not go on. One of the players rose and quickly left to fetch Hanuman.

Now let us follow this man into the green-room and see what is the matter

with Hanuman. The man to play the part of Hanuman is no other than our daft Nilkamal. But how he came to be here is easily told. When he last had an interview with Govinda Audhicari, he had moved that gentleman so as to induce him to make an appointment for him. But he was good for nothing, and Govinda Audhicari, wishing to be rid of him, in pity had him employed where he now was. Here he had a monthly pay of Rs. 4/-, and was more useful in preparing *chilums* of tobacco than in assisting at a play. He had never taken a part in a play before, but on this occasion, being short of hands the *audhicari* had asked him to play the part of Hanuman. Nilkamal was offended. He felt shame to appear in the character of Hanuman ; and though he had the mask and the tail on, he stood fast at the door of the green-room and refused to set a step further.

"Come, come, none of your fooleries now," said the *audhicari* rather coaxingly. "You will mar the play if you persist in your obstinacy."

"What do I care for that?" said Nilkamal. "Do you think I would go and imitate the monkey and be the laughing-stock of the whole assembly? Why, if I must play a part, it should be the part of a hero."

"Nonsense. A hero or Hanuman, it is all one to a player. Now, come along, do, and don't keep the assembly waiting for nothing."

"I would rather not stay with you," said Nilkamal, being still held back by shame, which he found it hard to overcome.

The Audhicari was perplexed. Rama still kept calling for his Hanuman's aid, and he felt this to be so trying and provoking. At last, in the midst of this dilemma,

the Audhicari exclaimed, "Nilkamal, I will raise your pay to Rs. 5/-."

Nilkamal was quick to feel the temptation, but he still lingered at the door as though he could hardly get the better of his shame. The *audhicari* and his men, however, wanted patience, and Nilkamal at last was forcibly led into the ring. "Ah, what could keep you so long, child," said Rama, addressing Hanuman. Hanuman was about to make the answer that was put into his mouth, but on looking around just then, his eyes lighted upon Bidhubhushan. No one could be more startled at seeing a serpent in his way than was Nilkamal at the sight of Bidhubhushan. Nilkamal at once thought that Bidhubhushan had probably heard that he had been found good for nothing by Govinda Audhicari, and also how he fared at present. No sooner had this thought crossed his mind than he felt such shame

and humiliation that he told the audience that he had never agreed to personate Hanuman but that he had only been forced to appear as such.

There was a roar of laughter when Nilkamal said that. But he spoke louder again and said, "You don't believe me, sirs, but I assure you that what I have said is the truth and nothing but the truth. Pray, don't call me Hanuman. My name is Nilkamal."

A deafening laughter again ; and Nilkamal sat down from very vexation and shame.

"*Bachha* Hanuman!" said Rama, addressing Hanuman.

"Nonsense, I am an honest inhabitant of Ramnagar, and I want the gentlemen around to know that," said Nilkamal.

"My worthy friend, Hanuman," said Rama again, "be good enough to help in the fight."

“What do I care for your fight ? What right have you, I say, to call me Hanuman ?”

The audience was greatly amused by Hanuman's words, but it was now difficult to restore order. By flattery and promises of a considerable increase to his pay, however, Hanuman was persuaded at last to help, but the help was nominal, and the fight was brought to a close by Rama dropping as he took up his bow and arrow. But the effect of the play was completely marred ; a noise and confusion prevailed, and the Audhicari had to propose that the play should be stopped.

Accordingly after one or two songs the play broke up. When the crowds had dispersed, Bidhubhushan rose and went up to Nilkamal. Nilkamal had flung aside the mask and was sullen. “How have you got here, Nilkamal ?” said Bidhubhushan, sitting down near him.

Nilkamal was offended. "I have nothing to say to you, sir," he said, turning his face away.

"What have I done to offend you, Nilkamal?"

"What have you done ! How could you laugh, sir ? How could *you* who know what I am worth ?"

"Oh, I couldn't help it."

"Why, I am not a mad man."

"Who says you are a mad man ?"

"I don't want to be among these fellows any longer," said Nilkamal.

"How would you like to make one among us, Nilkamal?" said Bidhubhushan.

"We should be very glad to have you. But what pay do you get here?"

"Six rupees." Nilkamal told him what was not true.

Bidhubhushan, who now was the head of the company, said on leaving, "Well, you shall have six rupees a month. Get

your dues and come over with your things as soon as possible."

Nilkamal now wished he had asked for a little more, thinking how readily Bidhu agreed to let him have Rs. 6/- a month.

Seeing the Audhicari he said, "Let me have my dues, I will not stay with you."

The *audhicari* was greatly displeased with Nilkamal ; so he was not at all sorry he was going away. When he had got his dues, Nilkamal went and got his *behala*, and left at once to join the company of *panchaliwallas*.

"Bid you farewell, *dadathakur*," said Nilkamal as soon as he saw Bidhubhushan. "I am going off."

"Going off ? whither ?"

"Anywhither my steps may lead me to."

"Why, aren't you going to join our company, Nilkamal ?"

"My mind was made up to go with you, but now I have changed my mind."

"Why, what has come over you?" inquired Bidhubhushan.

"As I was coming here, some rude boys shouted after me, '*bachha* Hanuman, *bachha* Hanuman.' I was so annoyed. How I should like to have given them each a good thrashing. But I would rather live among strangers. What guarantee is there you will not call me by that name if I go with you?"

"Why, Nilkamal, you certainly should know me better than talk like that."

"Oh, you are very good I know, but what assurance have I that the others will be as good as you?"

"Depend on me, you have nothing to fear." There was a faint smile on Bidhubhushan's lips as he uttered these words.

"Why, now, I see what your assurances are worth," exclaimed Nilkamal.

"I didn't say anything," said Bidhubhushan, looking as serious as he could.

"I cannot bear being made game of in that way. Come, will you promise never to call me by that name?"

"I do promise you that."

"But that's not all ; you must get your men to promise it too."

"Well, that's easily done." And Bidhubhushan rose and left him. Nilkamal now bethought himself of his favourite song which he kept humming to himself till Bidhubhushan returned. And then he asked him by signs without leaving off singing if it was all right.

Bidhubhushan looked on him with a smile to find him in such good spirits. Nilkamal, however, was quickly offended. "You can't blame me, Nilkamal," said Bidhubhushan.

"Why?" asked Nilkamal.

"Do you know what that song refers to?"

"No, and I don't care to know."

“Don’t be offended, Nilkamal. I will tell you. When Ramachandra fought his enemy, Ravana, who was invincible in arms, he wanted to invoke the aid of Durga, and sent forth Hanuman to fetch blue lotuses for her *puja*. The song has reference to that.”

“Oh, I see, I see,” exclaimed Nilkamal ;
“I will not sing that song any more. But what success, *dadathakur* ?”

“Oh, I easily got the men to promise that.”

“And I promise never to have anything more to do with that song,” said Nilkamal, looking very serious.

CHAPTER XXV.

"WHAT HAS SYAMA DONE ?"

AFTER Bidhubhushan's departure from home four years passed, during which Sarala could never for a moment forget her husband. Days passed, weeks passed, months passed, and great was her concern for Bidhubhushan. One, two, three months, thus four years had rolled away without even a word from him in whom all her happiness was centered. Many a time and oft Sarala had knelt before the guardian deities of the village to pray for the welfare of her dear husband. How many sleepless nights had she spent ! What great abundance of tears had she shed ! This had gone on for a long time, but at last her health gave way. And then an unwillingness to move consequent upon her having a dull and depressive

feeling of lassitude possessed her. Often was she to be seen sitting by herself—a picture of utter hopelessness. Her appetite fell away, and she scarcely had any sleep at night. Often at night, even in the very depth of winter, she was bathed in perspiration, the sheets being wet with it. But strange to say, the more she sunk, as if under a load of weariness, the lovelier seemed her lovely face. Though she looked rather well in the mornings, later in the afternoon her face was all in a glow, the eyes looking as if giving out sparks. Slowly but surely Sarala was going into a consumption.

When they had nearly exhausted the savings of Syama, Sarala was very much concerned. With the anxiety in her heart that ate into her vitals, and with want for their companion she grew from bad to worse till she was too weak to bear the least exertion of any sort. Then was it

that Syama became a mother to both Sarala and her child. Each morning as she was up her first care was to make them as comfortable as she could, and then she was out in the neighbourhood to earn food for both mother and child. When she had fed them she would go out again to have her own meal. Thus did she manage to save the mother and child from starvation.

Shashibhushan lived quite comfortably with his family in his new house. Since his removing to it immediately after its completion, Sarala had often had to stay alone in the old house, and at first was nothing afraid. But when at last she had grown so weak as to be confined to her bed, a vague superstitious fear laid hold of her. She fancied she saw a figure approach her bed and look on her with a frown. Her weak unsteady head conjured up other frightful visions before her eyes, and

she started in bed. Gopal now never left his mother, but always watched by her bedside while his look had such a sad expression.

Sarala started. "What did you start at, dear mamma? What ails you?" anxiously inquired Gopal.

"Oh, nothing, dear. But have you all along been with me?" said Sarala.

"Yes, dear mamma. How can I leave you now when you seem so unwell."

"How long have you been here? You won't run out to play, darling?"

"I never now play, mamma."

Sarala's memory failed now and then. When she had spoken her last words, she closed her eyes and seemed quietly to go to sleep. Soon afterwards she woke up again with a start and began eagerly to look around.

"What are you looking at, mamma?" said Gopal.

"Oh, nothing, my child. Have you all along been waiting here?"

"All along, dear mamma. I have never left your bed."

"Yes, yes, I quite forgot it," said Sarala as though she had been roused from a dream. "You haven't had anything to eat, dear?"

"No, mamma; but *didi* will be back soon, it is near time."

"Such a good soul! Why, she seems not of this earth, my child. Oh, we can never repay her kindness. How hard she works for us. Out in the morning and back again at noon; then out again and back at dusk. Will you promise, Gopal——?"

"Promise what, dear mamma?"

"That you will always regard Syama; that you will always use her kindly when I am gone from this world, child?"

"Oh, dear mamma, how can I use her

otherwise ? She couldn't be kinder if she were my own mother."

Sarala was deeply moved. She shut her eyes while tears gently flowed down her cheeks. Gopal affectionately bent over his mother and wiped the rolling tears away. "Will you put the pillows one upon the other, darling ?" said Sarala after a while.

Gopal laid the pillows one above the other. "That will do, dear," said his mother, as supporting herself on her arms she slowly raised herself to a sitting posture. The exertion made her breathe convulsively for over a minute. When she had quite got over it, she wished her boy to sit on her lap.

"I can bear it yet," she said. "A few days more and I may be deprived even of that happiness."

Gopal moved not. With eyes looking away from her, which overflowed with

tears, he remained perfectly still. His mother drew him fondly to her side, and he rested his head against her bosom and wept in silence.

"Don't be concerned for me, my darling," said Sarala, kissing his tears away and trying to laugh. "I shall be soon well. How can you think, dearest, your own mother can leave you alone in this world?"

These words rather increased his pain, and his tears ran the faster now. His mother put her arms round him and kissed him over and over again.

Shortly afterwards Syama returned. She was simply joyous when after a long time she saw a smile on Sarala's lips. "You are much better, *kakima*?" she said, approaching her bed, and sitting down near it. "Why, dear *kakima*, if you talk to Gopal and take him on your lap every day for a while, I will warrant that in a

few days you will be your former self again."

"I feel much better to-day, Syama," said Sarala. "Can any one have such a good daughter in Syama and such a good boy as my own Gopal and not feel better?"

"Why speak you of Syama? What has Syama done?" said Syama in her usual blunt way of speaking, as she rose and moved up to the door.

"Syama has done more than one's own daughter can do," said Sarala. "What more can any one do?"

No sooner had she spoken these words than Syama left the room. Syama could hardly stand by and hear anything said in praise of her. She could never like to make a boast of any act of kindness which she might do. What she gave she gave in private. She loved to do her good work in a quiet unostentatious way, and

expected no reward for it. Most men are fond of making a display of their good deeds. They would like the papers to talk of them. Such good deeds are destined to perish with the papers which praise them. Oh, Syama, thou best of women ! thy good deeds are registered in heaven on imperishable paper and in characters that never know how to fade !

CHAPTER XXVI.

SHASHIBHUSHAN'S NEW HOUSE.

IN Shashibhushan's new house Gadadhar had to himself a pretty little outer room for his own *baitakhana*. The carpeted floor of the room was covered with a valuable *galicha*, over which was spread a *jagim* with a bolster on it. Right in front of the bolster were two *hukas* in their stands, of which the shells were mounted with silver. Behind the bolster and close to the wall stood a clotheshorse on which hung two or three Simla-*dhutis* with *kokil*-borders, two shirts and one *chadur*. On one side of the clotheshorse which had on its foot-piece two pair of shoes was a walking stick resting against the corner, and on the other a rough chest made of the wood of the mango tree.

What was the matter with Gadadhar to-day? Why was he at home at this

hour of day ? He loved to move in the dark. He was a sort of night-walker. But he seemed in such restless anxiety to-day. Sitting or standing or lying down he could hardly be at rest in any posture for five minutes. Now he sat down, now he rose again, and paced impatiently up and down the room. He often put his head out of the window and looked up and down the path as though he eagerly expected some one. No one, however, appeared. "Hang this business," he said to himself as he stepped up to the clothes-horse and took down a *dhuti* and a shirt. He put them on, and then opened the chest and took out a bottle and a glass. He then poured some of the contents of the bottle into the glass, which he drank off at once, making a wry face as he did so. "*Sala*, Ramdhan ! I sent for brandy and he has sent me rum," he muttered between his teeth as he put the glass aside. But

did he stop there, because it was rum and no brandy? No. He poured out some of the liquor again, and, mixing it up with a little water, took it. Thus he took the third and the fourth glass. He felt that it was quite enough for the present. So he corked the bottle again, but before putting it away he held it up in the light and said, "There is still enough left." He then took his *chadur* and left stick in hand.

Gadadhar's *baitakhana* communicated with that of Shashibhushan. In a rich man's family, the relations of the master of the house, not even the most worthless of them excepted, are all important persons. As Gadadhar went on, a man came up and humbly begged a favour of him. He, however, dismissed him, saying that as he was very busy he might call another time. He had not walked many paces when he met the man he had been most

eagerly expecting, coming up the pathway. "Hallo ! Ramesh Babu," cried Gadadhar, coming quickly up with him. "Right glad you have kept your promise."

"When I gave you my word, I meant to keep it, you know," said Ramesh.

Gadadhar led Ramesh into his *baita-khana*. Opening the chest he poured out some of the liquor again, and held the glass to Ramesh, after qualifying it, as before, with a little water.

"What's it ?" asked Ramesh, taking the glass in his hand.

"Rum," said Gadadhar.

"You have diluted it with water ?"

"Yes."

"Then you had better take it yourself," said Ramesh, handing back the glass. "I will take it raw. We police officers are always for it, you know."

Gadadhar drank that glass himself. Ramesh took the glass from his hand,

poured out some of the liquor for himself and took it raw.

As Gadadhar was about to replace the bottle and the glass in the chest, Ramesh said, "Why, you wish me to say good-bye?"

"Oh, no," said Gadadhar, laughing. "But there is no harm in using a little precaution, I think. We can take them out again when we want them."

"Well, you may do as you like. But let me have another glass before you put the bottle away."

Suiting the action to the word Ramesh filled a second glass for himself and drank it.

"Now, let us come to the point," said Gadadhar, replacing the bottle and the glass and shutting up the chest.

"Well, we police officers are men of few words."

Gadadhar was somewhat offended. "It

is wrong in you," he said. "You would be on the safe side, and you must have a lion's share? That's not fair."

"Fair or not fair, I don't care," said Ramesh. "I am sure I can get as much out of that lad's mother or even more if I were to go and tell them of it. They are in such distress that any sum, however small, will be most welcome to them."

"This day's post brought a registered letter again. The postman on delivering the letter to me asked what relation I bore with the writer of the letter. I said, 'I am his younger brother.' Now, just think of all I have done. I have lied, I have forged, and it is hard that you must have three-fourths of the money."

"True, you have lied and forged; but who put that into your head, I want to know," said Ramesh.

"Not you, I will swear. When I showed the first registered letter to my

sister, it was she who advised me to keep it and sign the receipt."

"But who advised you not to sign your own name but put Gopal's instead so as to let the postman know that you were the identical person to whom the letter was addressed?"

"It was you, I admit," said Gadadhar ; "but if I never consulted you, you would never know anything about it."

"No ; but it was very fortunate you consulted me, for if you had signed your own name, the police would have arrested you long ago.

"But come, you must admit that your demand is most unreasonable. You see, if you have four hundred rupees out of six, I have only two hundred left. And then there is half of it to my sister. Do you think I would have cared to run such a risk as that for a hundred rupees?"

"I won't have anything," said Ramesh,

rising and pretending to be angry. Let all the money, that you and I have got, be put together and made over to Gopal's mother."

"A very good idea," said Gadadhar, laughing. "But there is no hurry about that, I suppose. Come, sit down, old boy, we must finish that bottle."

Ramesh sat down. Now, we shall take leave of him and of his most worthy friend to talk of the fate of Bidhubhushan's registered letters. Bidhubhushan's intention was not to return home until he had made money enough to make his family comfortable. From time to time he made remittances to his wife, and he naturally thought that they reached her all right when he looked on what he believed to be his own boy's signature on the receipt. He could think it was probable his boy had not learnt how to write a letter, though he might learn to write his own name.

To this rather than anything else he would ascribe his wife's silence.

Bidhubhushan's first registered letter fell into Gadadhar's hands. This worthy gentleman broke it open, and, on finding currency notes in it, went to his sister who advised him to keep the letter and sign the receipt. Gadadhar came away, thinking he would sign his own name, but on meeting Ramesh who had just come to make him a visit, he took him aside to consult him on the matter. Ramesh showed how very foolish it would be to sign his own name, and advised him to put Gopal's instead.

Ramesh often bragged of his being a police officer. And well he might do so ; for though, after the commission of the above mentioned crime, he seemed to be on very intimate terms with Gadadhar, he was shrewd enough to talk to him very guardedly in company.

Every time there came a registered letter from Bidhubhushan, Gadadhar intercepted it. "We are now living in that house," he said to the postman one day, pointing to Shashibhushan's new house, to which they had recently removed. As the office of the Post Master was within the confines of the *thana*, Ramesh, being often on the lookout for a registered letter from Bidhubhushan, would be sure to know when there was one from him.

Hitherto Gadadhar and Ramesh had had equal shares of the misgotten money.

In his last letter Bidhubhushan had said that he was going to come home very soon. On receiving the letter in the morning Gadadhar opened it at once, and as he read it to himself, his countenance fell and his hand trembled visibly. This naturally led the postman to suspect that the letter contained some bad news. So he asked Gadadhar, saying, "Who is this

letter from, Gopal Babu?"—"My elder brother," replied Gadadhar.

"No bad news, I hope?" again asked the postman.

"No," said Gadadhar, without looking up.

When Ramesh saw the letter, like a genuine policeman as he was, he seized this opportunity to work on Gadadhar's fears by threatening to betray him if he did not have two hundred rupees more.

Gadadhar was offended. "Pay you two hundred rupees!" he said. "Why, aren't you in it? You are as much concerned in this business as I am."

"Absurd! I never received any money."

"Oh, Ramesh Babu, what is this you say!" exclaimed Gadadhar in astonishment. "Do you say you had no share of the money!"

"Have you any witness to prove it?"

"Witness? Witness, I. I will swear in

court that you had half share of the money."

"You are the defendant. Your evidence is not valid," said Ramesh with the cool composure of a police officer.

Gadadhar now began to feel like a lost man. Ramesh had already had half of the stolen money amounting to six hundred rupees. And now he wanted two hundred more. By many entreaties, however, Gadadhar got him at last to come down to one hundred.

On leaving, Gadadhar had asked Ramesh to see him in the afternoon. Ramesh had said, assuming a look of gravity, that he would try to come if he had leisure.

After returning home Gadadhar sent to Ramesh almost every hour to request him to come very soon. Ramesh, however, never appeared till it was near dark. Gadadhar had taken care to provide himself with a bottle of liquor for the enter-

tainment of his friend. He had sent for brandy, but as Ramdhan had none, he had sent him a bottle of rum instead.

Now, as we have said, when Ramesh rose, pretending he was offended, Gadadhar persuaded him to sit down, saying that they must finish that bottle. Ramesh sat down, but he refused to take the third glass, when it was offered him, on the plea of his having to be very busy, though, as he said, he might wait a little longer if he would just keep his word.

Gadadhar wrapped his *poita* round Ramesh's hands, and in a tone of deep distress begged that he would be so kind as to excuse him, as his sister having got the money, it would be very hard to get anything out of her. Having thus made an appeal to his kindness he abruptly let go his hands, and falling on his knees caught hold of his feet, crying convulsively like a child.

"For shame, let go my feet, Gadadhar Babu," said Ramesh, nothing moved by his tears. "Remember, sir, I am a police officer, and there is no putting me off with such excuses as that. Come, quit hold of my feet or I will go and tell everything."

Gadadhar seemed to pay no heed to his words. He still clung to his feet while his face was bathed in tears. "Are you so hard-hearted that nothing can move you?" he said after a little while. "Oh, be not hard upon me!"

Ramesh was not one to be put off in that way. But he said nothing, and Gadadhar, taking his silence as a sign of his being disposed to be kind, quitted hold of his feet, and getting on his legs again, said, "I throw myself upon your mercy."

"Nonsense," said Ramesh. "Cash—one hundred rupees."

"Why, you are the most cruel and hard-hearted man I have ever seen."

"Perhaps I am," said Ramesh. Gadadhar felt that it was useless to urge any more ; so telling his friend to wait, he stepped into the house.

"The wretch !" said Ramesh to himself, "to live an altogether worthless life at the expense of his brother-in-law, and be always on the lookout for a mischief to do. But I am not to stop here. I will see him go to jail. Yes, the jail will let all merriment out of him."

In about half an hour Gadadhar returned.

"Well, what success?" inquired Ramesh.

"Didn't I tell you it was not easy to get anything out of her?"

"Don't want to listen to your nonsense. I want to know if she has agreed to pay the money. I cannot afford to wait any longer. Do you know that you are robbing the police while you detain me here?"

"I know I have had to be at great pains to get her to agree to pay the money. She would not consent to pay more than Rs. 50/- ; but by many entreaties I got her at last to comply with my request. She has agreed to pay Rs. 101/-, one rupee, you know, as the price of that bottle of rum."

"Go and bring the money then."

"Not to-day," said Gadadhar. "You will have it to-morrow."

"That cannot be. To speak the truth I tremble at the very thought of that letter. I shouldn't at all wonder if you or both of us have to go to jail. I, however, think I shall get off scot-free myself if I go and inform the police now, but I won't do that, because as a friend I cannot like to get you into any serious trouble. But if it were not you I would not take less than five hundred rupees just to hold my tongue about it. And what are you

to pay ? Only a hundred rupees more. And you talk of paying it to-morrow !”

Gadadhar made no answer, but rose as if mechanically and went in. In an hour he returned with one hundred rupees, which he put into Ramesh's hand. Having received the money Ramesh rose and left him in haste.

CHAPTER XXVII.

BIDHUBHUSHAN'S RETURN HOME AND DISCHARGE OF SARALA'S DEBT.

IT was a quiet but rather unpleasant evening in the month of *Vadra*. For seven days immediately running before there had been continual rain, and now it was drizzling. The road was full of mud ; and all through there were ruts of dirty water, and if a wayfarer carelessly trod upon one, the water would dash up as from a squirt and soil his clothes. There was in the air a stench of rotten leaves where the trees were growing rather thick on the way. The smoke of houses standing at a little distance from the road-side was rising among the trees. Here and there was a gleam of light that indicated the approach of dark hours. The mosquitoes and other insects were on the wing, and the croaking of the frogs almost

deafened the ear. There was not a stray sheep or cow to be seen, and very few men were stirring now.

At this time two travellers were moving slowly in the direction of Krishnagar. Each carried a small bag in his left hand, and in his right hand an umbrella which protected him from the rain. They had no shoes on their feet, but they had shirts on, and their *chadurs* were wrapped round their heads in the shape of a *pugri*. They trudged on, one keeping before, and the other just behind. They had walked several miles and were tired; and particularly so was the one that walked behind, as could be seen by his weary gait. Night overtook them as they entered a village. "Let us stop here for to-night," said the one that walked before, to his companion. These words were spoken in a low cautious tone as if the speaker was afraid of something. The reader of course need

not be told that the speaker is Nilkamal and the person to whom those words were addressed is our friend Bidhubhushan.

Not receiving any answer, he said again, "It is not advisable, *dadathakur*, to travel in the night, and specially when the *puja* is at hand, when one is not to feel quite safe on the way. Come, let us find a place where we can rest for to-night, for we can get up before day-break to-morrow and be off."

"Why, Nilkamal," said Bidhu, "you were not afraid of anything before."

"No, but now I am worth something."

"We are near Hanskhali," said Bidhu ; "and our village is only about two miles from there. Let us go on I say ; for depend on it, there is no fear of our being robbed on the way near Krishnagar."

"Let us go on then," said Nilkamal rather hesitatingly.

Bidhu took the lead, and Nilkamal

followed with some reluctance. A little way on Bidhu said, pointing with his finger, "Do you remember that tree, Nilkamal? It is there I made your acquaintance."

"Ah, *dadathakur*, it reminds me of my days of trouble."

As they came to the tree, Bidhu said, "Let us rest here for a little time."

They sat down under the tree. "You sit just where you sat before," said Nilkamal to Bidhu. "I remember you got frightened at the sight of me."

Bidhu looked round and sighed. Four years ago he had first sat in this lonely place and felt like one cast adrift upon the world. What a terrible time he had of it after his separation from his brother! What a gay jolly fellow he was when he lived jointly with his brother, and when his brother was very kind to him. He had experienced the brunt of the battles

of life fought. He had been through troubles that had given a very different mould to his character.

Nilkamal got a *chilum* of tobacco ready. "Take a smoke *dadathakur*," he said as he handed the *chilum* to Bidhu. When their legs were sufficiently rested, they got on their way again.

Fancy a man, who, having been long away from home, is about to be re-united with those who are dearest to him on earth. His face is lighted up in joy as he hopes to find them all safe and sound. Again it suddenly becomes overcast as he comes to apprehend any evil about them. Bidhubhushan's heart leaped with joy as he approached his native village. But he seriously asked himself, "Is Sarala well? May be," he thought again, "she is dangerously ill. May be—", but the thought he could not bear. When he came and stood before his own paternal

house at last, he was struck by a sort of gloomy stillness reigning over it. Four years ago it was full of noise, when there were more heads than could be conveniently accommodated in the house. Now it looked so dark and gloomy that his mind misgave him cruelly. He sank down on the ground. "Call, Nilkamal," he faltered. "Who is there?" Nilkamal cried, standing at the door and knocking. No answer, and the stillness that prevailed seemed only the more striking. "Oh, what means this silence, Nilkamal!" exclaimed Bidhu as if he dared not give utterance to his worst suspicion. Nilkamal knocked and called again. "Who is there?" inquired a voice from within. It was the voice of Syama who now walked, up to the door and again inquired, "Who are you knocking at the door at this late hour of the night?"

"Get out and see," said Nilkamal.

Syama opened the door cautiously, and saw two persons, one sitting on the ground, and the other standing close by the door.

"All well, Syama?" inquired Bidhu, picking up courage.

Syama instantly knew the speaker by his voice. Struck with sudden surprise and emotion she cried, "Oh, you! where do you come from?"

"Hush! Tell me, are you all well?" said Bidhu.

Syama paused for a moment. "Yes, we live; but where do you come from?" she said.

"Oh, Durga!" said Bidhu rising to his feet and drawing a long deep breath for relief. "But why do you ask that? Didn't you receive the letters I had sent?"

"Not a line from you since you went from here," said Syama. "And *kakima*, poor dear creature—she is almost reduced

to the verge of death for her anxiety for you."

"And how is Gopal?"

"He is well. Such a good dear!"

"Then let us go into the house."

"No, you must wait here while I go and prepare her," said Syama. "For if you go and see her all of a sudden, the excitement may make her faint away."

"Oh, Syama, is Sarala grown so very weak?"

"Too weak indeed," said Syama. And she left them at the door and went in again.

Bidhubhushan felt a secret pleasure when he knew that Sarala was so pulled down for her concern for him. Alas! how little he dreamed that her anxiety, eating into her vitals, had led her gradually to become a prey to consumption.

In about half an hour Syama returned. Bidhubhushan followed her in. What

happy moments were those to him ! All the way, and up to the door of Sarala's bedroom he wore a smile on his lips, but just as he entered the room, he sank down near the door as one struck down by a heavy blow. Sarala was worn to a shadow. Yet she had found strength enough to sit up in bed when she was told of Bidhubhushan's return home. "You have come, and I am so happy," she said with a sweet smile.

"Oh, Sarala," said Bidhu, his feelings giving a hoarseness to his voice, "it was the sweet dear thought of you that had cheered me and helped me to bear up under all trials ; it had been, as it were, the sustaining food of my existence during the long years of my absence from home. But how worn out and altered you are ! I had not the most distant thought of finding you reduced to this !"

Sarala smiled and said, "Now I shall

soon recover." As she was tired of sitting up, Syama smoothed her pillow and helped her lie down again ; and then she got together her dishevelled locks and tied in a knot.

Next morning Sarala felt so refreshed and easy that she was quite able to leave her bed, and Syama was simply joyous to see it. She was naturally led to think that nothing serious was the matter with her, and hoped she would soon recover. "Why, you see, *kakima*, my prediction has come true," said Syama to Sarala.

"What prediction, Syama?" Sarala asked with a smile.

"Why, I said you would be all right when *kaka* came home."

"You are so very good," said Sarala. "You can say nothing but it must come true."

She had scarcely said this when Syama

left the house. Syama could never like to hear her own praise.

In the night Bidhubhushan could hardly get any sleep for his concern for his wife, and he fell asleep towards morning. When he got out of bed, it was late, and the sun was shining brightly, and Syama was busy getting things ready for use in the kitchen. His joy knew no bounds when he found his wife up from bed, and looking so easy and cheerful. Though a frail ghost of her former self, indeed Sarala moved with such ease and talked with such cheerfulness that there seemed to be no doubt that in a short time she would be quite as well as before. She offered to prepare the meal herself, but Syama would not listen to it for a moment, and said she would call in *Thakrundidi* Digambari.

“Will she come?” said Sarala.

“Of course she will,” said Syama.

And she said again, "What do we care now? What can silver not procure?"

When *Thakrundidi* Digambari knew that Bidhubhushan was come home, and worth something now, without waiting to be asked twice she readily came away with Syama. Seeing Sarala she said, "You are so reduced, Sarala, and you never let me hear a word of it!"

Sarala only smiled and said nothing.

Soon there was the rumour in the village that Bidhubhushan had come home with plenty of money. Every one now wanted to see him. There went his neighbours and his former associates. There went those who never had condescended to exchange a word with him in his days of want and privation. Even not Gadadhar Chandra was behindhand. In fact all now seemed anxious to gain the friendship of the man for whom they had never cared before.

The day passed in conversation, and at dusk Bidhubhushan rose to go to his wife.

In the morning Sarala had found such strength that she fancied she was perfectly as well as any one. The whole time of morning she was busy doing this, that, and the other thing ; but afterwards she got tired, and soon felt such langour and relaxation of the limbs that she was obliged to take to her bed. Syama never now attended to anything but her eye was constantly upon Sarala ; and she immediately went to her and said, "What ails you now, dear *kakima* ? Why have you lain down again ?"

"I got no sleep last night, Syama. I feel so sleepy now." And she turned upon her side and composed herself to sleep.

After a time Syama went again to the bedside of Sarala. She was sleeping, sleeping as peacefully as a child. On her serene brow there was not a trace of

anxiety. Though she was so terribly reduced, and you could tell her ribs with your finger, yet how sweet was the expression of her face in sleep. There had been enough of rain and the air was quite cool, yet still she perspired copiously. Syama rubbed her hand clean ; then stooping she gently felt her forehead. It was cold as ice. But Sarala started, and lest she should wake her, she left the room with noiseless tread. "The air is quite cool, and still she is covered with sweat !" said Syama to herself. But she thought again that it might be due to her having been busy, and hoped she would feel refreshed after her sleep.

Night approached, but Sarala slept on. "She is still asleep?" Bidhubhushan asked Syama as he came in. "Yes," said Syama. Bidhubhushan looked rather concerned. He walked up, and, sitting down by the bedside of Sarala, felt her forehead.

Oh, it was so cold. Bidhubhushan was frightened. "Sarala, Sarala," he called out in great concern.

She opened her eyes. "Who are you?" she said, looking strangely at Bidhubhushan. As Bidhubhushan was about to speak, she said again, "Yes, yes, I know you. You have come to take my darling! But you shall not have him. No, you shall not, but I shall come." And she shut her eyes again.

Sarala was delirious. Bidhubhushan was alarmed. "Sarala, Sarala," he now called a little louder, bending over her, and again feeling her skin which felt awfully cold to the touch.

"Why do you disturb me so? I shall come, I shall come presently," she said, opening her eyes to shut them again the next moment.

Bidhubhushan left the room, weeping. "Oh, Syama," he cried, hastily appearing

before her, "Sarala, is so very bad just now, and I am so afraid. Hasten to her. I must run for a doctor."

Syama at once bounded to the bedside of Sarala. "Oh, my sweet *kakima* ! my most loving mistress ! what has made you so ill again ? You looked so well in the morning. Open your eyes, won't you ? Won't you talk to your own Syama ?" She heard her not. She lay perfectly still, as if wrapt in one of her sweet slumbers. A faded flower, yet the soft sweet expression of her face made a striking contrast to her wasted limbs. Syama sat down at the foot of the bed. Weeping silently she gently rubbed her feet, holding them on her lap.

Gopal was not in. He was gone to play with Bhuban, delighted to find his mother looking much better after a long time. As Bidhubhushan hastened on, he turned out of his way to go and inform

Bhuban's mother of the precarious state Sarala was in, and ask her to keep Gopal at their house for that night.

In about an hour and a half Bidhubhushan returned with a doctor from a neighbouring village. He was known to be the first medical man for several miles round and to have a kind heart. On his arrival the doctor at once gave the patient some stimulant. Sitting down by the bedside of Sarala he next proceeded to acquaint himself with the particulars of her illness. This done, he opened his watch to examine her pulse. He next set about the examination of her chest and sides while Bidhubhushan was kept in dreadful suspense. "What do you think of her, sir?" he said when the doctor had done.

"She has a fatal disease," said the doctor, pausing a moment. "Consumption. It cannot be cured, at least I have never seen it cured in any one, and I have

been practising these thirty years or so. The patient seems to have got this disease four or five years. If she had had proper medical aid in time, there might have been some chance of her living a year or two more, but that is a mere conjecture. In consumption there is no knowing when death may happen. Although she is so bad now, yet no one knows but she may live five or six months yet. But that is what in her present state seems next door to impossible. I am afraid she will not live out the night. That she was so easy all morning was due only to your return home after a long time. She might have lived a little longer if you had never come home now. In a case of consumption such as this, the reaction, after any very great excitement, often hastens the end. But even if she live out the night, it is certain she will not live long after it."

What Bidhubhushan heard was enough

to lacerate his heart. "Alas ! I am the cause of her death," he exclaimed, bursting into tears.

"Oh, this won't do," said the doctor. "You must stop weeping, sir, or you must leave the room. While there is life there is hope. But if you don't keep quiet, there will be no chance for her."

"Oh, I shall keep quiet, sir," he said, speaking in husky tones. "I shall not weep any more, but the thought that she might have lived a little longer if I had never come home—oh, that's too much for me."

"That's a mere conjecture," said the doctor, taking his hand within his. "But supposing it not to be a mere conjecture, isn't it too late ? What good is it to regret what cannot be redressed ?"

Bidhubhushan said no more, and the doctor sat watching the face of Sarala.

After a while her lip seemed to quiver.

She seemed faintly to ask for a little water Syama held the glass to her lips, but the doctor took it from her hand. Putting it aside he made her take a second dose of the stimulant mixture in a little water. "Very hot," she said, making a wry face.

Slowly her consciousness returned. Bidhubhushan could no longer restrain his feelings, and he exclaimed, weeping, "Oh, Sarala, you have had a most unhappy life with me !"

Sarala was fully conscious now, as people on death-bed generally are before they pass away. "Why do you weep ?" she said, looking up to Bidhubhushan's face.

"Sarala, Sarala, you are going to leave us and the world for ever, and you ask why I am weeping !" exclaimed Bidhubhushan in the greatest agony of his heart.

A celestial calm rested on the face of Sarala, which even moved the doctor.

"My end is near," she said, "but it is not true I have not been happy. A woman is happy if she has a kind husband and loving children. In my husband and in my child I have been happy, as happy as one could wish to be. I had such concern while you were away ; but now that you are come home I shall die in peace."

"Don't talk like that, Sarala, oh, don't, or my heart will break."

"In my last moments I have a request," said Sarala, seizing hold of Bidhubhushan's hand. She turned her eyes to Syama, but her feelings choked her utterance. Tears gushed from her eyes ; and Syama now burst into a loud wail. The doctor, unable to keep back his tears, covered his eyes with his handkerchief.

Bidhubhushan's hand was still held in Sarala's. After some minutes' pause, and when she had got over her emotion, she said, "My last request is this—be very

kind to Syama, and look upon her as though she were your own daughter."

"Syama is truly a daughter, nay, she is a mother to me," said Bidhubhushan, speaking vehemently. "We shouldn't now be alive but for her care of us. If I fail in my duty to her, I am a vile ungrateful wretch, and the curse of Heaven will be upon me."

He had scarcely done speaking when Syama left the room.

The doctor made an effort to put on an easy face, and poured out another dose of the mixture. "I don't want it, it is of no use," said Sarala, turning her face a little away, as the doctor was about to make her take it.

"Take it, Sarala, oh, do," said Bidhubhushan. "It will do you good. Your case is not too serious yet."

"I can feel I am a-going fast," she said. "I should have been dead and gone long

ago, but it was not so just, as I think, that I shouldn't go without seeing you. Let me see my child at my death."

Bidhubhushan looked significantly at the doctor, who said that her wishes should be complied with at once.

In a moment Syama left the house and was gone. She very soon returned, holding Gopal in her arms. As she was about to set him down, "No," said Sarala, "let him remain as he is." Then taking Gopal's and Syama's hands in her own, she said, "Do you remember, Gopal, what you said a few days ago? You have a true mother in Syama. Be good to her. I dare say you will be as good as your word." Turning to Syama she said, "To me you have been a kind mother, a gentle daughter, and a sweet nurse. Nothing can repay your kindness. But, oh, Syama, my child—my own Gopal I give to you ; he is yours."

As she spoke her last words, her eyes quickly turned in her head. The house burst into a loud piercing wail. For a moment life flickered in her eyes, and then they were closed in death for ever.

And on the fire scene it is.

CHAPTER XXVIII

MISCELLANEOUS TOPICS

STEP by step Shashibhushan had risen to the highest post in his master's gift. He looked down from his exalted position and felt himself at the height of his glory. In his master's eye he was as trustworthy as intelligent. The master spent his time with his boon companions. In fact while he had his few hundreds a month to spend in drink and dressing, he cared not to trouble his head about anything.

How true is the saying there is no unmixed good in the world. Raised to the highest post Shashibhushan made enemies around him. Those under him, who had wished to see him in his present dignity and voted for him, now wanted to have him out of the way. His predecessor was a very strict man. During his incumbency no one would dare to give or take any

bribe ; the *amlas* were much in fear of the watchful eye of the *dewan*, and no one would dare to neglect his legitimate duty or do it in a perfunctory way. But was not Shashibhushan a fellow *amla* ? Was it not more than probable that he would be very indulgent towards his subordinates to become the *dewan* ? So indeed the *amlas* had thought and hoped. But when he did become *dewan*, it made no difference with them. He chose to be as strict as his predecessor had been. Then it was that they became his enemies and wanted to be rid of him.

The *amlas* met together one day to decide upon the best course of getting rid of the *dewan*. Several plans were discussed and rejected. At last the *kerani* Babu said, "Let a manager be appointed and then will Shashi Babu find the place too hot for him. That's what I think. We can induce the old lady to apply for

a manager on the express grounds that the estate is not managed as it should be, and that the master has lost his head by too much indulgence in drinking."

This proposition was agreed to at once unanimously. There was, however, the *khajanji* who did not quite relish this idea. "I am afraid," he said, "if a manager be appointed, there will be very few chances of our making even what little we are now able to make."

This silenced all. But at last the *kerani* Babu said, "You need have no fear on that head. On the contrary we may hope to fare better under a manager. Figures correct, and cash all right—that's all he would want to see. He will not be half as particular as Shashibhushan is, you may depend on that."

He spoke with such an air of confidence that they all agreed to adopt the course

pointed out by him ; and so they dissolved the meeting and went home.

Bidhubhushan, as might be expected, took the death of his wife very much to heart. A gloom was cast on his features. He avoided company and kept indoors. Sometimes he would shut himself up in his room and freely indulge in his grief. Syama could never like him to be alone, and at times she would get Gopal to stay near his father. But if he was out, she herself would sit near him and converse with him. One day as Syama sat by, talking of this, that, and the other thing, Bidhubhushan said, "You received not one of the letters I had sent ?"

"No, not one," she said.

"Then, who received my registered letters ?"

"Gadadhar received some registered letters," said Syama.

"What ! Gadadhar ? Who were they from ?"

"From his maternal uncle, at least he told us so."

"Oh, the scoundrel !" exclaimed Bidhubhushan, rising abruptly and making towards the door. "The rogue ! The ugly rascal has been intercepting my letters. There is no doubt he has stolen my money." And on he rushed with a mad man's fury. Syama, unable to see how Gadadhar could intercept his letters, quickly hastened after him. She called to him entreatingly to stop, but he would not listen to her and was soon off.

Bidhubhushan went straight to the Post Office. Seeing the Post Master, he questioned if he had had any registered letters to the address of one named Gopal Chandra Chatterjee.

"Yes," said the Post Master.

"To whom were the letters delivered ?" demanded Bidhubhushan.

"To the addressee of course. Do you want to look at his signature on the receipt ?"

"No, not just now, I am in haste. But will you please order the postman to go with me and point out the man to whom he delivered the registered letters ?"

The Post Master ordered the postman to go with Bidhubhushan. After walking a little distance the postman turned in the direction of Shashibhushan's house. "There is no doubt about it," said Bidhubhushan to himself. And describing Gaddhar, he said, "You mean this fellow, do you ?"

"Indeed, sir, I do," said the postman.

"Well, you must know that the letters were not delivered to the addressee. But you can go now ; it is he undoubtedly, and there is no need to identify him," he

said, stopping near the door of Shashibhushan's house.

"He said he was the addressee, and I believed him. I am quite innocent, sir." And the postman looked imploringly up to his face.

"I should hope you are, but you are not to make any noise about it," said Bidhubhushan. "I tell you plainly if the fellow should escape, it would go hard with you."

"I will not breathe a word about it, sir." And the postman made a respectful bow and left him.

Bidhubhushan next saw the *daraga* of the *thana* and acquainted him with the particulars of the case. "It is near dark now," said the police officer. "You come to-morrow morning. To-morrow morning I will go with some of my men and do our duty."

"In the meantime if the fellow should escape?" said Bidhubhushan.

“Well, to prevent that I will send up four constables to keep watch through the night.” And calling Ramesh, he gave his order, adding that strictest silence should be maintained to make sure of the culprit.

“I will do as you order, sir,” said Ramesh, as he moved to enter the names of four constables in the Diary Book. He then sent them off on their errand after giving them the necessary instructions, and telling them that they must manage very quietly. He next began to think whether he should warn Gadadhar of his danger. But he soon decided on leaving him to his fate.

In the midst of his fancied security Gadadhar was as easy in mind as any one. For three or four days after Bidhubhushan's return home, however, he had lived in the greatest anxiety; but when a whole week had passed without even a whisper

to suspect something being in the wind, the fear of his nefarious crime being brought to light he dismissed altogether from his mind, and was again as merry as before. It was to avoid suspicion, as he thought, that he had been to see Bidhubhushan.

Throughout the night the constables had kept watch round Shashibhushan's house without any one of its inmates knowing anything. Next morning as Shashibhushan was about to leave the house, noticing a constable loitering near his door he asked what he wanted.

"You will be pleased to wait for a little time, sir," said the constable. "Our babu will be here presently."

"Your babu? What's his business here?" said Shashibhushan in some surprise.

"The long and short of it is that Gadadhar Babu has been intercepting letters

addressed to another person, and we have come to arrest him, sir."

Shashibhushan had heard that Gadadhar had received a registered letter, and this he at once recalled to his mind. As it, however, had never roused his suspicion, he had never cared to ask any questions about it. Now when he learned the truth he grew very indignant. Calling Gadadhar, he said, as he gave him an angry look, "Bring me that registered letter from your uncle." Gadadhar faltered. He looked from him to the constable, the sight of whom struck him with such terror that he withdrew immediately, and running into the house, at once made towards the back-door. His mother and sister, seeing him run, cried, "What's the matter, Gadadhar Chandra? What makes you run?" Gadadhar paid no heed to their words and ran quickly past them. They at once hastened after to see what was the matter

with him. Before they could come up with him, he reached the backdoor. Opening it he was just about to run off when he was confronted by a constable there. He uttered a terrified scream and fled back in horror.

“What’s the matter, Gadadhar Chandra?” cried both mother and daughter at once. —“Oh, that letter, that letter. It’s all up with me.” And he fled precipitately to his sister’s room. They quickly saw what was the matter. In a little time they went to him. There was Gadadhar lying on his face on the floor and crying convulsively. For a minute they stood looking on in silence, and then the mother said, “Be comforted, my son ; believe me, no harm will come to you.” But Gadadhar, crying, rolled ‘about on the floor and refused comfort. Just then Shashibhushan’s voice was heard on the stairs. “Where is that wretch ?” he cried. Com-

ing quickly to him, he said in a bitterly reproachful tone, "Why do you weep now? You richly deserve it. That letter was from your uncle, wasn't it? You are done for, you have brought disgrace upon my house."

Pramada and her mother were quick to feel the sting of Shashibhushan's words. The offence committed by Gadadhar was nothing in their eye. But Shashibhushan, they said, should certainly have spared the words he most injudiciously had spoken. "I apprehended it, Pramada," said the worthy mother. "Yes, I did. That is why I hesitated to accept your offer to come and make my home with you. Poor as we are I think we have as keen a sense of honour as any one has."

"Drop it, mother, drop it," said Pramada. "It is your destiny, you couldn't avoid it."

"What is this nonsense!" cried Shashibhushan, looking at his wife. "I tell

you what, if you really feel any concern for Gadadhar, get him to put on a *sari* and let him pass for your sister. I must go and see if the *daraga* has come. May be he is waiting at this moment for me at the door. So be quick, and don't you waste time in talking nonsense."

On coming away Shashibhushan found the *daraga* in charge of the *thana* waiting at the door as he had expected.

"You know on what errand we are here, sir?" said the *daraga*. "Gadadhar Chandra Chakravarti is a relation of yours and lives with you. We have come to arrest him on the grave charge of his having intercepted some registered letters addressed to another person. Please get him out or we must help ourselves."

"What! search the house?" said Shashibhushan.

"Of course, if you do not give him up peacefully, sir."

"How can you talk in this fashion, sir? You must remember that this is a respectable gentleman's house."

"Respectable or not respectable, that's none of our lookout, sir. We must do our duty."

"Well, you may search the house if you like, but if you don't find him in?"

The *daraga* looked inquiringly at Bidhubhushan. "I am sure he is within," said Bidhubhushan.

Shashibhushan flung an angry look at his brother. Bidhubhushan nothing cared for it. They all together entered the house. They searched the rooms and went all over the house, but in vain. At last Bidhubhushan said, "We are forgetting the kitchen."—"True, yes, we must examine that," said the *daraga*. "Let the females walk out before us one by one while we stand aside." At first Shashibhushan opposed, but the *daraga* would

on no account listen to his objection. He was, therefore, obliged to call to the females and bid them leave the kitchen one by one.

Out stepped Pramada first, then following in her steps came Gadadhar in the disguise of a female, and next their mother who brought up the rear. Bidhubhushan knew Gadadhar at a glance and slyly pointed to him with his finger. The *daraga*, taking the hint, at once asked Shashibhushan to tell the one, who walked in the middle, to stop.

Shashibhushan would have said that the person in question was his sister-in-law, but Pramada's mother was before-hand with him. Through fear she forgot herself and said, "She is my eldest daughter, Gadadhar Chandra."

"Arrest him," cried the *daraga*. Gadadhar uttered a scream of horror and ran into the nearest room.

The constables quickly followed him in and arrested him.

In due succession Gadadhar went from the *thana* to the Magistrate's court, and thence to the Sessions, where he was convicted and got fourteen years. He was, therefore, sent off to the Andamans.

Though Gadadhar was punished, Bidhubhushan had really no pleasure in his punishment. He rather felt sorry to think of his fate. After the death of his wife, his own paternal house had a dull and dreary aspect for him. He no longer wished to live in it. He often smarted with the recollection of the troubles she had undergone in it. Besides, his funds were nearly exhausted. So one day he got together his clothes and a few other requisites, packed them up in his canvas bag, and, accompanied by his orphan boy and the good faithful Syama, left again for Calcutta. As he knew very few persons

in Calcutta, when he was there, he was not a little concerned for his boy and Syama. He was, however, soon relieved of his anxiety. Syama was employed as a servant in a gentleman's house, and here Gopal was placed in charge of the kitchen. And it was arranged that he should remain there and prosecute his studies as a free student in the Duff School. As regards Bidhubhushan, after a few days' stay in Calcutta, he left with a Deputy Collector for Dacca.

CHAPTER XXIX

NILKAMAL'S RETURN HOME.

NILKAMAL passed that night at Bidhubhushan's, and early next morning, before anyone was stirring, he got up and left the house. On coming to the Bazaar near Ramnagar, he bought a new suit of clothes. Going on, and leaving the bazaar some way behind, he put on his new *dhuti* and *chadur*, and felt very proud as he eyed them almost at every step that he took. Walking leisurely he got home at about meal time.

His mother and brothers, knowing him at once by his voice, came running to meet him. The mother wept aloud and the brothers shed tears, for their joy was most unexpected, as they had long despaired of ever seeing him again.

Being at home after a long time Nilkamal cared for nothing but his own comfort.

He would have his meal ready anyhow before ten in the morning. His brothers would dare not contradict him, for was he not more clever than they ? And he had been earning money all the time he had been living away from them.

After meal Nilkamal would regularly go to a neighbour's where he spent his idle hours in relating events of his life abroad, in talking of the great city of Calcutta, of songs and *jattras* and other stuff and nonsense. And he seemed indeed to live a most pleasant life ; but he was destined soon to see the end of it.

One day as he was telling an amusing story, the children of the neighbourhood sitting all round and listening, he was startled by a neighbour asking to know what part he regularly played in a *jattrra*.

He had touched him at the most delicate point. Observing his confusion another repeated the question.

Nilkamal felt very angry, but he said with as much composure as he could command, "There is no playing a part in a *panchali*."

"Yes, but you were not all along in a *panchali* party," said the one who was the first to put the question. "When you were in a *jattr*a party what had you to personate?"

Nilkamal could no longer control his passion. "What business have you," he cried, "to make yourself a busy body in things that don't concern you?"

"Nilkamal was fit only for preparing *chilums* of tobacco," said one, greatly enjoying his ruffled temper.

"That's a relief," Nilkamal said to himself, thinking that they took it in that light, and tried to pass off the matter with a laugh. But just then another said, "Nilkamal played the part of *Hanuman* in a Ram-*jattr*a."

“Who told you that, you impudent meddler, who told you that, I want to know,” cried Nilkamal in great exasperation. When he had said that, he rose abruptly, and was about to leave when his ear was offended by cries of “*Hanuman*” from behind. Turning fiercely round he rushed forward to punish one of the offenders ; but failing to take him, he quickly got out into the way and turned homeward in great vexation. But the boys, who were not to miss such good fun, instantly followed and went on shouting “*bachha Hanuman*” after him. And they showed no tendency to disperse even when Nilkamal got home, but hung doggedly about as they incessantly poured honey into his ear. It was so trying. Nilkamal raved, and gnashed his teeth and tore his hair, as one ready to run mad, to the great enjoyment of the boys. “Why do you lose your temper, my son ?” said his mother when

she had tried in vain to disperse the boys. "Let them call you *Hanuman* or anything they like. If you don't lose your temper they won't trouble you any more."

"Call what, mother ! Oh, must you too join those brats in driving me mad ! But go on, I have nothing to say to you. I will not remain in this house." And Nilkamal hastened in with a bustle. His mother hurried in after him, saying that she possibly could mean no offence, and tried hard to pacify him ; but he was deaf to all her entreaties, and, getting his few clothes into his canvas bag, went off with the boys shouting "*bachha Hanuman, bachha Hanuman,*" after him till he had passed the boundary of the village and was fairly out of sight.

When, on their return home, the brothers heard all from their mother, they went off at once in search of Nilkamal, but in vain. They went forth again the next

day, and when they were some ten or twelve miles from Ramnagar, they knew on inquiry that a man, quite answering to their description, had indeed come there, but whither he was gone no one knew.

CHAPTER XXX

GOPAL AND HEM CHANDRA.

HEM CHANDRA lived in a two storied house in a rather narrow street in Calcutta. In the upper story there was only one room which was used as his bedroom. On the ground floor, the room on the side of the street, furnished with pictures was his *baitakhana*, in one corner of which stood his reading table with a shelf right over, which held his books. Gopal lived near and attended the Duff School. Somehow or other he had attracted the notice of Hem Chandra, who watched him every day as he passed on his way to school by his door. Indeed, he was as regular as a clock, for Hem Chandra generally got ready for school to see him pass by as usual.

One day Gopal was coming home. It was drizzling, and he had no umbrella.

Holding his books covered with his slate, upon his head he walked home at a rather quick pace. As he approached the house where Hem Chandra lived, down came all of a sudden big drops of rain, and he was obliged to run to it for shelter.

Hem Chandra had come home a few minutes before. Seeing him pass by his door every day he had long desired to make his acquaintance. And now an opportunity offering unexpectedly, he invited him to come and sit in his *baita-khana*.

"Oh, thank you, sir," said Gopal, "let me wait, please, where I am."

Hem Chandra, however, went up and pressed him to walk in with him. "The rain will not hold soon, and you will get tired of standing," he said.

Gopal could no longer refuse. Following him in he very humbly took his seat on one end of the *chowki*, while his feet,

ill-protected from dirt with a pair of shoes much worn, rested on the floor.

"Come here, please, make yourself comfortable," said Hem Chandra.

Gopal looked hesitatingly at his feet. "I am quite at ease where I am, sir," he said.

"I don't think so," he said. "You cannot be quite comfortable there."

Gopal, who could hardly resist so much kindness, had at last to make the confession, humble as it might be, that his feet had dirt on them and that he was afraid he should spoil the clean *chadur*.

Hem Chandra at once ordered his servant to help Gopal to wash his feet. After that he very kindly took him by both hands and made him sit by him. In a little while he was pressing him to partake of some refreshments held in a plate before him.

"Excuse me, sir," said Gopal. "I am not in the habit of eating anything now."

Hem Chandra, however, would not hear him, and taking up the plate in his hand helped him very kindly.

Gopal ate rather reluctantly. The rain now poured in torrents, and it was pitch dark. The street in front of the house was flooded, and very few people were about now. "The rain will not hold off soon," said Gopal. "Let me go now, sir if you please."

"What! go in the rain! That can't be."

"My clothes are wet and I want to change them," said Gopal in default of a better excuse to make, for he felt rather ashamed to tell why he wanted to go.

"Why, you can as well change them here." And Hem Chandra ordered his servant to bring him quickly one of his clean *dhutis*.

"Excuse me, sir. I really don't want it. It is something else which obliges me to go now."

"Don't want it !" exclaimed Hem Chandra, feeling his clothes. "Why, your *dhuti* is all wet."

"Do let me go now, sir," said Gopal, preparing to rise. But Hem Chandra most lovingly held him to his seat, saying that he would on no account let him leave in the rain.

"You are so very good," said Gopal. "I wanted to make your acquaintance, because I thought you might kindly allow me the use of your books. And now I am so glad I have made your acquaintance. It is quite a pleasure to sit by you and talk to you. But really I cannot afford to wait any longer just now as I have some very urgent business to attend to."

"What urgent business can you have ?" said Hem Chandra, smiling kindly.

"Oh, since you are pleased to be so very kind to me, sir, I think I must speak

it. I have to cook in a family for board and lodging." As Gopal said that, he hung down his head for shame.

Hem Chandra, to divert his mind, said at once, "If you wanted to make my acquaintance, why didn't you do so before?"

"I feared you would not speak to a fellow like me."

"Why?"

"Because—because you are a big man."

"But I am not very big, not more than an inch bigger than you, I suppose."

"Oh, I didn't mean that," said Gopal, smiling.

"Never mind what you meant," said Hem Chandra, handing him the *dhuti* the servant had just then brought. "Now, do it on, please," he said.

Gopal was obliged to put on the *dhuti*; and he was going to fold his own to take with him, but Hem Chandra wished him

to leave it, and requested him to call again on his way to school the next day. He then ordered his servant to see him home, bidding him at the same time take an umbrella and a lantern to light him on the way.

In the house where Gopal lived there was a boy who was called Kanai. He was the eldest son of his master and was about his own age. When he saw Gopal enter, he cried in a bantering tone, "Hallo ! my young friend, right glad you have come at last. Oh, you can't walk without a light !"

"Please excuse me, Kanai Babu, I was detained on account of the rain."

"You were detained on account of the rain !"

"Oh, stop, please, do, master will hear."

"Oh, you silly little fellow ! Do you make any distinction between father and me ! But he has heard you."

"I will not tolerate this," cried the master. "I don't want a nabob cook. Do they think they may do as they like? Let them leave my house to-morrow. They won't do for us."

Syama had been waiting, having got everything ready for use in the kitchen. "Where have you been so long?" she said to Gopal. "You see how they scold us." Tears were in her eyes. She wept to think that the poor boy should have to submit to such humiliation as this.

"Oh, I was detained at that babu's, the same I told you about the other day. He has a lot of books. Coming home from school, as I approached the house where he lives, the rain came on and I ran to it for shelter. The babu noticed me. He came out to me, and very kindly invited me to come and sit in his *baritakhana*. He made me put on this *dhuti*, as mine was rather wet, and eat some *khabar*, for he

said that I must be hungry after school.

He would on no account let me leave in the rain, but I persuaded him at last, and he ordered his servant to see me home. Oh, *didi*, he is so very good. I have never seen one of his years so good and gentle."

"God bless him," she said, brightening up. "May he have a long and happy life!"

"Do you like to know his name?"

"What's his name, dear?" said Syama.

"I was eager to know it, but I thought it wouldn't be just proper to ask him. At last I opened a book and there I found it. But the book might not belong to him, I thought that. So I opened another, and another again, and then I was satisfied. Hem Chandra. Isn't it a pretty name, *didi*?"

"What's in a name, dear, unless the bearer of it has good qualities."

"Oh, *didi*, if you saw him, you would

see how very good he is. He has kindly promised me the use of his books."

"I would very much like to see him. Are there any female members in their house?"

"No," said Gopal.

After a pause of a minute or two he said, cooking, "Will you put a little oil in the *handi*?"

"There is none, not a drop," said Syama.

"Then can you not spare a little out of the oil for my own use?"

"Not much left, just enough for your use to night."

"But it is late, I will not read to night."

Out of her wages Syama paid for oil for Gopal's use at night. A quantity of it had often to be spared to use in cooking, or the master's wife would be sure to accuse them of stealing her mustard oil.

When food was ready, Gopal served it

in several plates, which he carried up, one after the other, to the master, the mistress and the little Kanai Babu. He next got ready a plate of rice for Syama, and was just about to have another ready for himself when he heard the voice of the young master wanting him. He hastened to obey his summons. "What's your pleasure, sir," he humbly asked.

"Oh, you are getting to be a nabob, I see," said the master rather angrily. "Can't you wait upon us while we are eating? You won't do if you must have your own way."

The young master laughed. Gopal uttered not a word, but stood by with sad downcast looks.

"You, nabob, bring me some more fish," said Kanai Babu.

To pacify them Gopal had served out more than enough of the *dal* and curry, the *vagis* and *khatta*, and all the fish with-

out keeping a bit either for himself or for Syama. So he said, "There isn't any more."

"What ! four pice worth of fish, and it's all gone !" said the master's wife.

"You surprise us," said the young master. "You must show us the dish for holding curry."

Gopal went back, and after putting in together what little curry he had put in the plate of rice for Syama, and what little was left for himself, quickly returned with the dish for the young master's inspection.

"You have kept some of the fish, and you lie," he said with great effrontery.

His words greatly pained Gopal, and he said, "Then I must wait here, and you will be pleased to go with me and look for yourself when you have finished your meal."

"Oh, you insolent little rogue ! you have learnt to give an answer !" said

Kanai Babu. Gopal said no more. After their meal was finished, he went downstairs to Syama and said to her, "You take your food, *dididi*, I won't eat anything to-night."

"Why won't you, dear?" asked Syama.

The insulting words they had used to him had greatly wounded his feelings. "Oh, I have no appetite," he only said.

Syama, however, was quick to see what was the matter with him. So leaving her food untouched she went to bed with a heavy heart.

CHAPTER XXXI

GOPAL HAS SYAMA'S CONSENT TO TAKE UP THEIR ABODE WITH HEM.

AFTER Gopal had left, Hem Chandra called to their old servant Ramkumar. Ramkumar had grown old in the service ; and he loved Hem well, for he had seen him born, and attended on him and nursed him. Living with him in Calcutta he filled, so to speak, the place of a guardian, taking good care of him and offering him wholesome advice. Nevertheless he regarded him as his master, and Hem as much liked him, and cared for him as an old good servant.

Ramkumar slowly entered, and took his seat on the *taktapos*.

"You have seen the boy, Ramkumar ?" said Hem.

"Oh, the boy who was here ? Yes."

"Well, what do you think of him?"

"What shall I say? I know nothing of him. But he seems a good and gentle boy."

"Oh, he is so gentle and modest. And he is a lovely boy, isn't he, Ramkumar?"

"Lovely is that loves his lessons."

"Oh, Ramkumar, you are always very cautious in your speech," said Hem, smiling.

"And so you will be too, when you are an old man like me. But what's his name?"

"I didn't ask his name. Indeed he has such modest ways, and such bright intelligent eyes too. I must confess he already has won a place in my heart."

Ramkumar looked round him and up to the ceiling, and said nothing.

"The boy has a rather hard life, Ramkumar. He has to cook in a family to stay in Calcutta to go to school. Such

delicate fingers he has ! It appears to me that they once had known prosperity."

"I don't know, but there may be lots of such boys as this in this great city of Calcutta."

Hem greatly felt for Gopal. He very much wished to have him near him ; and he talked to lead Ramkumar on to suggest for himself what he desired, but he was rather pained at his indifference.

"Well, Ramkumar," he said again, "what will become of us if we be suddenly reduced to poverty ?"

"Reduced to poverty ! No, no, that will never be. But if you can get learning, you will earn plenty of money, and then you will be able to live in a respectable style and do what is good and laudable."

Ramkumar still seemed not to see what Hem was driving at.

"But fortune is fickle," rejoined Hem.

“To-day I am a rich man, to-morrow I may find myself a beggar. Well, if we, by some mischance, be suddenly reduced to poverty——”

“Tush ! it is idle to talk like this,” said Ramkumar, interrupting him with all the importance of an old privileged servant.

At this point of conversation, a servant entered and announced that meal was ready. Hem rose and followed him in. Sitting down to supper he ate in a sort of gloomy silence while Ramkumar waited by, as usual. He afterwards walked upstairs to go to bed. Ramkumar followed him in a little time. He slept in his young master's bedroom.

“Ah ! Ramkumar,” said Hem, chewing *pan*, “while we are in bed and are comfortable, that poor boy may be up cooking still ! Oh, I really very much feel for him.”

“May be he is born to do it,” said Ram-

kumar. "If everyone were born to govern there would be none to obey."

"But I feel a great sympathy for him and would so much like to have him here," said Hem after a brief pause.

"Well, if you are so eager to have him here, you may tell him so."

"Father, I dare say, will not object to his staying here."

"Not at all. Has he ever refused you anything?"

"Yes, father is very kind to me. But do you think I must write to him about it?"

"I don't think it is necessary, but you may write if you want to."

His mind being set easy about it, Hem prepared to go to sleep. Failing, however, to get any sleep, he rose, lighted the lamp, and engaged himself in writing a letter to his father.

Next morning, after he had sat at his

books for about half an hour, trying in vain to direct his attention, he sent to Gopal the hurried line, "Would you, please, come and see me now?" As in the mornings particularly Gopal had very little time to spare, he sent back word that he should see him positively on his way to school.

This day Gopal managed to very quickly finish the cooking, and serving up the meal had to wait till the master and his amiable young lad had finished eating. Then taking a few hasty mouthfuls himself he quickly got ready for school. And he never forgot Hem Chandra's *dhuti*, but taking it with him neatly folded and nicely wrapped up in a broad sheet of paper was off in a moment. As he approached his lodging, the blood rushed in his veins, and his eyes shone with a light that seemed to impart a peculiar charm to his face. For a long time Hem had sat waiting and watching at the open window of his *baita*-

khana. Directly his eye caught sight of Gopal he hastened to the door to receive him. Grasping him warmly by the hand he led him into his *baitakhana* and made him sit by him on the *taktapos*.

Gopal put the *dhuti* by. "What's this?" said Hem. "Oh, but why should you have given yourself the trouble?" he said again.

"It was drying when your servant went to me."

"I sent him for *you*, not for the *dhuti*," said Hem a little abashed. After a pause he said again, "I want to propose something to you."

"Let me know it, please."

"I am afraid to speak it," said Hem, smiling.

"Do not say so. It is very kind of you to talk to a fellow like me."

"Indeed, my dear sir, I do not know what you will think."

"Oh, please call me by my name, please say Gopal. You seem to forget that I am only a cook, sir."

"Well, let us make terms," said Hem, laughing. "I will call you by your name, and you must promise me something in return."

"I shall be glad to do anything in my power, sir."

Hem was just about to speak out his mind, but he suddenly checked himself, smiled and said nothing. Just then the servant, Hera, put the *huka* in his hand. When Hem had smoked, he handed the *huka* to Gopal. "Take a smoke, please," he said. Gopal only put the *huka* in its stand. "Oh, I beg your pardon, I quite forgot you don't smoke," said Hem.

There was a pause, during which Gopal's eyes were wandering among the books arranged in a neat row on the shelf. "I should be so glad," said Hem, "to let

you use my books ; but we may not infrequently happen to want the same books at one and the same time."

"I shall feel much obliged," said Gopal, "if you will kindly let me have only such books as you can well afford to spare for a time."

"I wish we could live together, as then you would at all times be welcome to use my books."

"It is very kind of you to say that," said Gopal. "Am I to understand——?"

"Speak it, please," said Hem, smiling kindly.

"That you want another Brahmin cook, sir?"

"Why, what could make you think of that?" said Hem. "I wish you would live with me as a friend."

Gopal was too much moved to speak, and he only hung down his head. "What say you to that, my friend?" said Hem.

"I am not alone, sir," said Gopal in a rather hoarse voice. "I have a *didi*, and we live together."

"*Didi* !" said Hem with some surprise.

"Oh, be not surprised, sir," said Gopal in a sad tone. "In our better days we had a maid-servant called Syama. I should not have been alive but for her care of me. At one time when we fell in extreme want, it was her savings that kept us from starvation. We can never repay her kindness. My mother, dying, commended me to her care. Oh, she can never bear separation from me!"

A tear glistened in Hem's eye. At this point Ramkumar entered, and Hem said to him, "It is just as I guessed." He then told him what he had heard. "Then it is all right," said Ramkumar. "If Syama be able to help in the house we may do without another maid-servant."

"I cannot, however, give you any assurance, sir," said Gopal.

"Why, do you mean to say that they love you too well to let you go elsewhere?" said Hem.

"No, sir," said Gopal, hanging down his head. "I was scolded for being a little late yesterday. And they used——"

"Used what?" said Hem.

"No, sir, I must not——I ought not to speak ill of one whose salt I have eaten."

"Well, let that go," said Hem. "Now tell me what you mean."

"I must ask *didi*, sir. I cannot do anything without her."

"Very well. When do you let me know?"

"I will see you again this evening, sir."

In the evening while Gopal was engaged in preparing the meal, as usual, he told Syama all that Hem had been saying and all that he had said to him. Syama was deeply moved by the communication made to her. "We may go there, my love," she

said, "but we do not know what the other persons are like. What shall we do if they treat us with insolence ! Nobody here knows anything about us. But there, as you have said everything, we can never bear being in disgrace."

"He questioned me in such a way," said Gopal, "that I could not but say all to him."

"Oh, you have done nothing wrong," said Syama. "But what do you think ?"

"I think we shall be very kindly treated there."

"Then let us go there," said Syama, after a brief pause. "But we must tell them now that we want to go elsewhere."

Gopal was simply joyous. When he had finished cooking he ran to tell his kind friend that they were going to come next day.

CHAPTER XXXII .

NAVANARI.*

IT was now the time of autumn, and there was joy in every countenance at the prospect of the approaching *puja*. The bazaars were crowded with buyers, for all now were busy making their *puja* purchases. Fancy things were exposed for sale everywhere. The school boys joyfully looked forward to their *puja* holidays. Everything, indeed, looked gay now that the *puja* had come round.

Living together, Hem and Gopal greatly grew in love and affection for each other. Gopal called Hem *dada*, and the latter truly loved him with a brother's affection.

"You are going home?" Hem asked Gopal. "If not, I would wish you to go home with me."

* A book so called for its containing the lives of nine illustrious women.

"No, I am not," said Gopal, "but I should be so glad to go with you to your village."

Hem and Gopal were come home for the *puja* holidays. Svarnalata soon became greatly attached to Gopal. She called him Gopal *dada*. With no one would she read so willingly as with him. If it was the meaning of a word or anything she wanted to know, she would go and ask him and no one else. They were, indeed, as brother and sister.

"I hope you are not neglecting your lessons, Svarna?" said Hem one day.

"Why, no, brother, I read every day."

"Well, I should like to see how you are doing. Bring your book, Svarna, will you?"

Svarna ran and quickly returned with a book.

"What's it?" said Hem as she handed him the book.

Navanari.

"Well, where do you wish me to open?" said her brother.

"Open somewhere in the life of Sita, I like that best."

Hem ran his fingers over the leaves, and, turning to an interesting portion in the life of Sita, began to read. He read on, stopping at times only to say, "Do you understand, Svarna?"

"Oh, brother," cried Svarna after trying to follow him attentively for a while, "you read so fast. I shall not read with you, I shall read with Gopal *dada*."

Hem laughed and said, "Then call your Gopal *dada* here."

No sooner were the words spoken than off flew Svarna.

Gopal was in the *baitakhana*. She quickly appeared before him. Taking hold of his hand she said, "Come, get up, Gopal *dada*, brother wants you."

"Why, Svarna?" said Gopal.

"Walk in and you will know."

Svarna fondly pulled him on by the hand while Gopal kept pace, smiling. Leading him into her brother's room she made him sit near him.

"You want me, *dada*?" said Gopal.

"Yes; but why do you always wait outside, Gopal? You ought to feel quite at home here."

Gopal blushed and said, "I was only in the *baitakhana*, there is company there."

"Well," said Hem, smiling, "Svarna doesn't like to read with me. She prefers your teaching."

Gopal commenced at once, as he sat beside Svarna, holding the book open in his hand, and explained, as he read from one stop to another, giving just equivalents for such words as she was not likely to know. After a while Svarna's eyes were

off the book and gazing at the bright open face of her young tutor. Gopal looked up from the book and met the gaze of her soft dark eyes. He coloured. He murmured, "I hope I am clear enough, madam," and cast his eyes again on the open pages of the book.

"Whom do you call madam?" said Svarna with a smile. "Why, what has come over you now, Gopal *dada*?"

Gopal turned very red in the face. It was the first time that he called her madam.

Hem had been lying in bed and listening to his teaching. He now rose to leave the room. "Where do you go, *dada*?" said Gopal. "Oh, wait a little, please, I shall get done very soon."

"You go on teaching, I shall be back in a little time," said Hem and left the room.

Gopal resumed his teaching, and explained on, but not quite so freely as at

first, and without raising his eyes from the book.

"Why don't you hold up your head, Gopal *dada*? What's the matter with you?"

"Oh, nothing, madam. Now let us finish this page," almost whispered Gopal.

"*Madam* again! O Gopal *dada*, you are off your head."

Gopal looked at her for a moment. "I am very poor, Svarna," he said, holding his head down. "I used to cook in a family. I should always be very respectful in my behaviour." He looked at her again as he stopped. A tear was in his eye. And Svarna, in order to divert his mind, said, "You have no *puja* at your house, Gopal *dada*?"

"No, we are very poor," he said. And the tear that had started to his eye now fell on the open page over which he bent.

Neither spoke for a while, and then

Svarna said, "You have grandmamma, Gopal *dada*?"

"I have no grandmother, Svarna."

"Mother?"

"No mother."

Svarna's face became clouded in an instant. After a little pause she rather sadly inquired, saying, "Do you know anything about *my* mother, Gopal *dada*?"

"Why?" said Gopal.

"Oh, my playmates have all got their mothers; but grandmamma says it is not so with every child. Whenever I ask father about my mother, I don't know how it is, but there is always a tear in his eye, and he kisses me and says 'poor child!' and will not tell me anything."

"Svarna, your mother is dead."

"And yours too?"

"Yes, my mother also is dead."

"Oh, then we are both alike," said Svarna. But the thought of his good

deceased mother moved Gopal to tears. He covered his face with his hands. He wept, the tears trickling between his fingers.

Svarna looked on in silence for a while, and then she said, breaking into a short laugh, "Why do you weep, Gopal *dada*? I also have no mother, but I don't weep. Come, dry your tears, and let us go and have a look at the *pratima*. Do you have such fine *pratimas* as here in your village?"

Gopal said nothing. "Come on, be quick," said Svarna again. "Oh, can't you walk, Gopal *dada*?"

Gopal now brushed away his tears and was ready in a moment to follow her.

When they had come to the outer parts of the house, "Oh, stop, Svarna," he said; "I want to say something to you."—"Well, what, Gopal *dada*?" said Svarna as she stopped. "Say nothing about my weeping, Svarna."—"Then you are not to talk of what I have been saying," she said.

CHAPTER XXXIII

GOPAL AND SVARNA FALL IN LOVE WITH EACH OTHER

AFTER the talk they had had together Gopal and Svarnalata were no longer what they had been to each other. Indeed they were smitten with a peculiar feeling which turned their thoughts into a new channel. Gopal had now no business in the *andermahal*. He could no longer like to talk in company, and he often wanted to be alone. Hem had come home after a year, and he spent much of his time in making visits and conversing with friends. Yet he failed not to see that Gopal did not look quite so well as he used to do, and this he ascribed to his anxiety about his father's unaccountable silence. Two or three days he caught him so absorbed in his thoughts that he was never conscious of his presence until he felt the touch

of his hand, and then he turned with a start.

One day Hem said to him, "What ails you, Gopal? You look much paler than you used to do."

"Oh, I have not long heard from father. I am so uneasy at his silence."

"Don't be anxious, Gopal. I dare say he is quite well. But have you written to him?"

"No, I haven't."

"Oh, then you write a letter."

Hem took out a note paper and commenced himself at once. Presently, however, he stopped. "You had better write yourself, Gopal," said he.

Gopal wrote the letter. In due course came the expected reply from his father. "Always rest easy about me, my son," he writes to say, "and be very careful of your health and studies." And he also had lovingly made mention of Hem, express-

ing his deep sense of gratitude to the family.

Now about Svarna. She was very unlike what she used to be. What was it that made her so? What it was Svarna herself knew not; yet she keenly felt the force of it. Much as she would wish to sit by the side of Gopal and talk to him, she felt she could not go before him now. How she would wish to fondly pull him on by the hand again. Formerly if she found her brother alone, she would be sure to inquire of him about her Gopal *dada*. Now she dared not ask him. How quick her heart would beat against the side of her ribs when she but heard her brother's steps in the *andermahal*; then she would move on to see if anyone was coming after him. And if there was no one, how disappointed would she feel. And yet when her brother was not alone, and following in his steps was the one on whom she

would gaze and gaze for ever, how she felt she was not her own master, how her eyes would at once be bent to the ground.

If accidentally their eyes met, both of them would look away. She now never called him Gopal *dada* nor would she sit in the same room with him without a third person being near. If ever they chanced to be confronted with each other, how great would be their shame and confusion. Her books were just in the same place where she had put them last, and they had not at all been meddled with since.

Svarnalata had now nothing to do with girls of her years. She liked to be alone with her own thoughts. It seemed as though she had suddenly become a woman.

After the *puja* was over, as one day Hem, being in his room, talked with Gopal, in stepped his father. As he took his seat by them on the *taktapos*, they hastened to move so as to keep a respectful distance.

"Your school re-opens soon ?" said the old gentleman, looking at his son.

"Yes, father," said Hem,

"Well," said Bipradas, speaking again after a little pause, "Svarna has attained her marriageable age. We must find a suitable match for her."

"Why, we must, but have you received any offer from any one, father ?"

At this point of conversation Gopal rose abruptly while his face was greatly flushed. "You need not go, my young friend," said Bipradas as Gopal prepared to leave the room.

"He had better walk a little, father ; he is rather dull to-day."

As Gopal left, Bipradas turned to his son again and said, "Yes, I have had offers from three or four persons, but not one of them is worth accepting. There is a young man living near Sreerampur. He has scarcely any recommendation sav-

ing his father's money. Takurmohashoy, however, would have me pitch on him rather than any one else."

"Why, such alliances are by no means desirable, father."

"Quite so, my son. I wanted to consult you, and I told *Takurmohashoy* so in reply to his letter on the subject."

"But what do you think of the other offers that you have received, father?"

"Oh, not one of them is worth accepting as I have told you. I have rejected them all."

"What think you of Gopal, father?" Hem asked rather hesitatingly.

"Gopal, oh, this boy you mean?"

"Yes, father."

Bipradas shut his eyes as if to consider, and then he said, "Yes, he is a pretty looking boy and seems very promising too. But didn't you say that his father was without means?"

"What does it matter, father? Is not Svarna's portion quite as good as a fortune? And Gopal may be very prosperous in life, no one knows."

"No one knows of course. And Gopal is also a high *kulin*. Let me think over it. Your suggestion seems good, my son. Only if his father had competence the match would be very desirable in every way." When Bipradas had spoken these words, he rose and left the room in a thoughtful mood. After a little while Hem also rose and went off to find Gopal.

CHAPTER XXXIV

GOPAL ENTERS THE BAITAKHANA AND FINDS SVARNALATA THERE

Now when Gopal left the father and son, he came away and turned mechanically toward the *baitakhana*. As he was about to enter it, he met Svarnalata full in his way. Why had Svarna come there ?

In the morning, noticing her brother and Gopal talking together in the verandah adjoining the hall, she wondered where her father might be. Presently, however, she saw him pass through the hall to the verandah. She flattered herself he would stay there for a time. So coming quickly away she halted near the *baitakhana* ; then creeping to the door on tiptoe, she peeped in. There was no one inside. In she stepped with a trem-

bling heart. She thought she should be very careful not to make any noise, but everything, it seemed, wanted to be in the way. For as she moved round a chair, she nearly upset it, and in trying to prevent it from falling she knocked a book clear out of its place, and down it came to the floor with a noise. She quickly picked it up. On the fly leaf there was the name Gopal Chandra Chatterjee. She sat down and contemplated the book for a while as though it had a peculiar interest for her. Then putting it back in its place on the table, she rose and drew to the clothes-horse, on which hung Gopal's *dhuti* and *chadur*, the same that had been given him by her father as his *puja* gift. She knew that Gopal had put them on when he went to see the *vasan*. She carefully arranged the *chadur*, of which one end had come off to the ground. But presently she took it off again, put it on and whis-

pered as she eyed herself, "Thus did he put it on on the day of *vasan*."

Scarcely had these words escaped her lips when she started at the sound of footsteps outside near the door. And before she had time to be ready to be off, Gopal was before her. "Svarna!" whispered Gopal as though he could hardly speak for his surprise. In her sudden shame and confusion she dropped the *chadur* and hurried off as fast as she could.

Gopal picked up the *chadur*. Putting it away rather carelessly on the clothes-horse, he threw himself on his bed. "It is not for me," he thought to himself, "to aspire to the hand of Svarna. What right have I to look higher than myself? Svarna is a rich man's daughter, so very pretty and so intelligent too. But what makes her so eagerly sought in marriage is the fact that her father has willed a considerable sum of money in her name. The

old gentleman will not like of course to contract an alliance but with one who is his equal. Would that my father had had competence. But how I wish her father had not willed any money in her name. Then I might have been able to get some one to try to conciliate her father for me. But the will can be changed. I don't care for her money. Yet why should Svarna give up her portion? She cannot love a poor unfortunate fellow like me. Since she knew that I was the son of a very poor man she has never come before me. How I wish I had never seen her. If she cannot love me, what's the good of my loving her? And who knows but when I am gone from here I may never see her in my life again. Away then with the thought of her."

He rose and went and took his seat at the table. Opening his history he began to read. It was, however, to no purpose ;

for when, after a while, he stopped to refresh his memory, he found that his reading had made no impression on his mind. He put the book aside, and took up his Grammar, thinking he would try to do better this time ; but he soon had to give up the attempt as altogether useless. He next thought he would write a letter and took out a note paper. Putting in the date, he stopped to think to whom he should write. He recollected a friend or two who really cared for him ; but at last he made up his mind to write to his father. As he had put at the top the date in English, he clipped that side of the letter paper and commenced at once in Bengali. But he began so to blot and blunder after he had commenced to write that he thought it was of no use, and flinging the pen aside and tearing up the letter, he went and lay down in bed again.

He had just lain down when Hem en-

tered. "Oh, you are here," he cried. "I have been seeking you. Didn't you hear me call?"

"No," said Gopal, sitting up.

"I called aloud," said Hem. "It is strange you didn't hear me. But come," he said again, taking hold of Gopal's hand, "it is near meal-time, let us go and take our bath."

"When are we to go down to Calcutta?" asked Gopal.

"Not settled yet."

"But what about——?" Gopal would have said Svarna's marriage, but he checked himself. It was well Hem did not hear him as it happened he was somewhat absent at the time.

CHAPTER XXXV

MEETING OF BIDHUBHUSHAN AND NILKAMAL WITH A NOTICE OF HOW SHASHIBHUSHAN FARED IN HIS PLACE AS DEWAN

LEAVING Gopal behind, Bidhubhushan, as the reader may remember, left Calcutta with a Deputy Collector for Dacca. This gentleman, after their arrival, gave Bidhubhushan a *Muhurigiri* under him, and he began to live with him. At first, for want of experience, he had some difficulty in doing the duties of a *muhuri*, but by his earnestness and constant application he soon succeeded in mastering his work. The gentleman was very fond of music, and Bidhubhushan, having had some proficiency in it, soon ingratiated himself with him. Out of his pay he occasionally made small remittances to his son, and he now seemed perfectly content

with his lot and to have nothing to complain of.

One day as Bidhubhushan was sitting in a shop where he occasionally gave custom, he heard a sudden uproar very close out in the street. Quickly getting out to see what it was about, he saw a tall blackish fellow coming on in a great flurry, while in his rear came a number of rude boisterous boys, throwing dust in showers and continually shouting "*bachha Hanuman.*" He quickly knew him to be his old friend Nilkamal. Nilkamal now looked not like himself. He was much fallen off in flesh, and he wore very long hair on his head, and his beard was allowed to grow and reach down to his breast. His eyes, which were naturally red, now looked much redder, which gave a wild look to his features. At times, when his patience was quite tired, he turned fiercely round upon the boys as though he would

fall on them and pull them to pieces ; or made a violent rush at them, gnashing his teeth and cursing furiously. But the boys were always too quick for him ; and when they fell back a few paces or dispersed as occasion required, it was only as if to return to the charge with redoubled force. As Bidhubhushan walked up to him, he raised his hand to strike him. But presently knowing him he cried, "Oh, you ! I beg your pardon, *dadathakur* ; but deliver me from these little devils, oh, do, I beseech you."

"Why, what's the matter, Nilkamal ?" said Bidhubhushan. "How came you to be here ?"

But the boys were continually shouting "*bachha Hanuman*," and Nilkamal only begged and entreated him again to drive them away. Bidhubhushan tried all he could to disperse the boys, but in vain. At length, as the only alternative left, he

led Nilkamal into the shop. The boys, after hovering about for a while, left the place and quickly disappeared.

When it was quiet, Nilkamal turned to Bidhubhushan and said, "What brought you here, *dadathakur*?"

"That is just what I have been asking you. Why didn't you return to your appointment. You were pretty well off."

"Why didn't I? Ask my fate. O *dadathakur*, there is no peace for me in this world. Wherever I go I must, it seems, be made a butt of the men and the boys. I had to leave Ramnagar too soon, for there too the boys were after me, crying what is enough to drive me mad. It is all, I think, owing to that mischievous song, but you know I have long given up singing it."

"I am glad you have, but why do you lose your temper, my friend? That's your weak point."

"I know it is, but I can't help it. Why, the mention of that horrid name is enough to make me forget myself."

"You mustn't mind it, my friend. But you look much paler than you used to do."

"Oh, I am weary of such a miserable life as this."

Bidhubhushan tried to comfort him as well as he could and talked with him till night when he said, "Will you come with me to our lodging, Nilkamal. You are welcome to eat and sleep there."

"For three days," said Nilkamal, "I have had nothing to eat nor do I want to eat anything now. My appetite has quite fallen away."

Bidhubhushan was touched with compassion to hear him talk thus. "Wait here, Nilkamal," he said, "while I go and fetch something to eat for you."

"No, no," said Nilkamal in a resolute tone. "I won't eat anything." As he

spoke these words, his face, as Bidhubhushan could well see in the moonlight, assumed a terrible look, the eyes in it glowing like two coals of fire.

"Come, don't fret about it, my friend. You mustn't take it too seriously to heart."

"I think I will go with you," said Nilkamal, suddenly springing to his feet. Bidhubhushan talked to him very kindly on the way ; when he had got to his lodgings, he made him sit in a room while he went to fetch something to eat for him. When he returned, Nilkamal was gone. He hastened out into the street to look for him, but in vain.

Now let us turn to Shashibhushan. The *amlas*, who all along had wanted to get him out of the way, had induced the old lady to apply for a manager. The magistrate of the district, to whom the application was made, had come on inspection in person.

When this important 'functionary arrived according to a previous intimation given and received, he was shown into the *kachari* where the babu, contrary to his wont, was seated near where his *amlas* were at work. He sat on a fine soft bed made on the carpeted floor, with his back lazily resting against a bolster. Hard by stood a table on which were a few fine showy things. He was, as usual, not in a sober state. He looked very red in the nose, and his eyes were bloodshot. His mouth was stinking horribly, and he could hardly speak with any distinctness. He had a fan in his hand, which he waved to and fro to keep off the flies, which nevertheless returned again and again, tempted by a strong smell from his mouth, and flew round his head with a buzz. The magistrate viewed him with feelings of great disgust. He, however, put two or three questions to him, to which he could

give no answers save what were put into his mouth by Shashibhushan. The magistrate saw at once how things really stood. His order, on leaving, was that until the Government found an able man to appoint as manager, the work of the *shrestha* should be suspended, and that Shashibhushan should render the past ten years' accounts in proof of the manner in which he had discharged the duties of his office as *dewan*. The order quite staggered Shashibhushan. Indeed he felt like one who was going to be put on his trial for a very grave offence. If he had got his dismissal instead, how happy he should have felt ! This day when he rose to leave, the *amlas* would not show their respect by rising from their seats, as usual. Indeed they sat fast, making believe they were too busy. Even such people as made *salam* to him whenever they met him seemed exceeding strange this evening. All the way he

walked, holding his head down ; and when he got home, he sank down on his bed dressed as he was, for he was greatly oppressed in spirits.

"What news ?" asked his wife, seeing him look so poor.

"I am a ruined man already."

"You don't mean it ; come, what did the *shahib* say ?"

"Why, I am to render the past ten years' accounts, and that means my ruin you know," was the short reply made by Shashibhushan.

Pramada would say no more, and left the room rather abruptly.

After a while Shashibhushan rose and proceeded to his *baitakhana*. Here he waited, expecting the *amlas* would call, as usual, on their way home from *kachari*. Night came on, yet no one appeared, and he grew very impatient. At every approach of a footfall he flew to the door

to see who was coming. But it was only either the goldsmith or the tailor or somebody else whom he owed money.

He at last sent to the *amlas*. He had word brought back that they were particularly engaged and consequently could not come. "Ah, I suspected as much," said Shashibhushan to himself. They could crush him at any moment. He felt that. It was near nine, and he rose and left his home. He went straight to the *kerani* Babu's, where he met with a very cold reception. The *amlas* were all there, but they no longer cared to treat him with respect. The *kerani* Babu was smoking his *huka*. He was not to smoke in Shashibhushan's presence, but what did he care now ?

After having sat in silence for some minutes the *amlas* rose to leave. At this Shashibhushan, who had been silent all the while, very meekly said, "I beg you

will kindly wait for a little while ; I am here to ask a favour of you."

"Of me !" said the *khajanji* with a serio-comic expression of his face as Shashibhushan looked at him, when he had spoken his request. "Surely your honour is joking."

"Come away, *khajanji mohashoy*," said the *moonshee*. "It is getting late."

"Oh, be so kind as to wait for a little time," said Shashibhushan. "I am here to ask a favour of you all."

The *amlas* resumed their seats. "My prayer," said Shashibhushan, "is that you will be so kind as not to let me be ruined."

"For my part," said the *kerani* Babu, "I have nothing to do with accounts. Properly speaking I have little or no concern in this matter."

"But may I not ask you," said Shashibhushan, looking at the *kerani*, "to be so

kind as to contrive to help me out of the very great difficulty I am in ?”

“Well, it seems he has no business with us,” observed one of the *amlas*., “Let us be off then.”

Shashibhushan, with joined palms and tears in his eyes, said that his business was with all of them, and that unless they took pity on him in his helpless position, he was a ruined man.

The *amlas* relented when they observed the humiliation of the *dewanji*. After some discussion they agreed to let Shashibhushan go untouched, but on this condition that he should pay them a thousand rupees each and afterwards resign his situation.

CHAPTER XXXVI

"WHERE IS GOPAL?"

TROUBLES never come singly. Hem's father is no more. The family had scarcely ceased to mourn over his loss when a fresh trouble came upon them—Hem was down with an attack of smallpox. In that year smallpox raged fearfully in Calcutta, and a great many people were carried off by this fell disease. It did not, it is said, spare even those who once had suffered from its attack.

On the third day of his fever Hem had the first appearance of smallpox on him.

"You had your inoculation?" Hem asked Gopal; for then there was no vaccination.

"Yes," said Gopal.

"Still you should be very careful," said he. "I fear I have got smallpox."

Gopal looked minutely. What he saw

very much alarmed him. There was indeed a rush of small red pimples almost all over his body, which looked very suspicious. Without one word he left the room, and, taking his *chadur*, at once went off for the best European physician then practising in Calcutta. It was not long before he returned with the doctor, who, on seeing the patient, declared his case to be one of smallpox.

Within two or three days his whole body was awfully swollen. His throat was so sore and painful that he could neither speak nor swallow any food, though it be a little milk, without great difficulty.

Day and night Gopal knew no rest. He kept constantly by the bedside of his friend, and would not for a minute leave him by himself to take his food or drink. Sometimes he had his food served up in the sick room.

“I cannot like your constantly staying

near me, lest you should catch it," said Hem to Gopal, speaking not without great difficulty. Gopal said nothing.

After a while he said again, "Have you sent home any intimation of my illness?"

"No," said Gopal.

"Say nothing about it."

"I have got two letters from home," said Gopal. "Will you look at them, *dada*?"

"No, you see them and write a reply," said Hem.

Gopal wrote in reply that things were all well with them.

Two or three days afterwards Hem was delirious. Night and day he lay raving in bed. In his ravings he talked of Svarnalata and Gopal. Gopal was always by, and tears were often now in his eyes.

Syama attended on him regularly in

her leisure time. "Did you ever know a case of smallpox like this cured?" Gopal asked Syama with tearful eyes.

"Oh, I have seen much worse cases cured."

"Have you? Oh, *didi*, I am so afraid you know."

"Don't be at all afraid. Depend on me, he will be well again."

Just when Syama had spoken these words, they heard a coach draw up at the door. "The doctor has come," almost cried Gopal. Syama hastened downstairs. On opening the door she met the doctor just stepping out of the coach. In a minute he was by the bedside of the patient. When he had examined, he asked, looking very serious, "How long has he been in this dull drowsy state?"

"Since early morning," said Gopal, "he has not spoken a word." The doctor presented a look of some concern.

"The case is very serious, sir ?" asked Gopal.

"I am afraid it is," said the doctor rather hesitatingly. This answer was too much for Gopal, and he burst into tears.

"Oh, don't weep, my friend," said the doctor speaking very kindly. "Nurse him well. No one knows but his case may take a favourable turn. It is not hopeless yet."

Lest there should be any omissions on his part, Gopal took note of everything that the doctor said to him.

"We have as yet sent no intimation of his illness," said Gopal to Syama after the doctor had left. "We ought no longer to keep it from them at home."

"Why, it is by no means wise to be sure," said Syama. "For, God forbid, should the worst happen, what will they think of us ?"

"You are right, *didi*," said Gopal. And

he at once wrote to Svärna the following note :—

SVARNA,

Dada has got smallpox. He bade me say nothing about it or you would have heard from me before. He is quite unconscious now and has been so since this morning. The doctor says his case is not too serious yet. If you want to come, come at once. Syama and I are diligent in our attentions to him.

Yours affectionately,

GOPAL.

When Gopal had sent the note, he felt much relieved.

On receipt of the note, Svärna and her grandmother became exceedingly anxious. That very day they prepared to start for Calcutta ; but as they had never been there before, and it would not be just easy for them to find Hem's lodgings, Svärna's grandmother was rather concerned. She,

however, soon hit upon a plan. Their *thakurmohashoy's* native village was near Sreerampur. She had more than once been to his house ; and they would go there, and thence proceed to Calcutta with a proper person to take care of them on the way and see them safe to Hem's lodging.

Their mind thus made up, they were borne in a palanquin to the railway station, which was not far off from their village. They booked themselves for Sreerampur, and when the train arrived, they were off in it. At nightfall they reached their *thakurmohashoy's* house.

As soon as Shashanka Shekhar Smritigiri (for that was the *thakurmohashoy's* name) heard of the arrival of Svarna and her grandmother, he hastened to the door to welcome them. The old lady, as soon as she saw him, fell on her knees before him and bowed down, reverently touching the ground at his feet with her forehead.

Her example was quickly followed by Svarna. When Svarna's grandmother had risen to her feet again, "Oh, *thakur*," said she, "Hem is seriously ill. To-night we must reach Calcutta. As it will not be easy for us to find his lodgings, I must request you to order your servant to go with us."

"I can take you there myself," said the *thakurmohashoy*. "But what is his illness?"

"Smallpox," said Svarna's grand-mother. "O *thakur*, we are so afraid."

"Fear nothing," said he; "some *daiva-karjya*, however, is necessary and the sooner it is begun the better."

"Oh, do anything that is necessary, and never you mind the expense."

When she had said that, she took a fifty rupee note from her purse and put it into his hand.

It was dark and the *guru* knew nothing of its value just then. But when he had ascertained at the light the sum paid,

which was certainly much greater than his most sanguine expectations, how very glad he was. "Why, I am in luck to-day," said he to himself. But he was a man who understood his profession well. So going to his *sisyas*, and concealing his feelings as best as he could, he said, "You have made a liberal advance, though I do not think it will cover all expenses." "Begin with it," said the old lady, "I will pay again as soon as necessary."

"Well, but I was thinking how you could go to Calcutta to-night."

"Why, there is no train?"

"No," said the *guru*.

"Then please send at once to hire a *pansi*. We must anyhow start to-night."

A man, accordingly, was sent off, but he returned after about an hour to inform that no *pansi* could be availed of to start 'to-night.'

Svarna and her grandmother were,

therefore, obliged to stay for that night at their *thakurmohashoy's*. The next morning, before the sun was up, they were all ready to start. They were very soon joined by Shashanka Shekhar who, not for his devotion but for show, had charitably daubed himself with *ganga-mrittika*. On his appearance, the *sisyas* bowed down as before holiness itself. He blessed them saying, "May *Durga* grant you your prayer!" He then asked if Svarna had her inoculation.

"No," said the old lady. "It is hereditarily prohibited in our family."

"Then I would have her stay here," said the *guru*. "Calcutta is not a fit place for her to live in now."

Svarna, however, refusing to be left behind, her grandmother said, "You are not to disobey the *guru*, child. What shall we do if you go down to Calcutta with us and have smallpox?"

Svarna made no answer. And the *guru* said, "Why, you can understand we ought to know better what will be for your good. Now, stay here, my child, and depend on me, you will often hear of your brother while you are here."

Svarna was obliged to stay where she was, and Shashanka Shekhar quickly left for Calcutta with her grandmother.

On their arrival, before it was very late in the morning, they found Hem lying unconscious in bed. Two or three minutes before the doctor had arrived. How glad were all when, after seeing his patient, the doctor declared for the first time that day that he was fairly out of danger now.

Soon after the doctor had left, Hem opened his eyes. "Where is Gopal?" he asked. "Here am I, darling, what do you want now?" said his grandmother.

CHAPTER XXXVII

SHASHANKA AND HIS NEIGHBOUR HARIDAS.

LEAVING his *sisya* behind, Shashanka Shekhar left Calcutta that very day and reached home before dark. Almost as soon as he set foot on the house, Svarna appeared before him. "How is my brother?" she inquired, eagerly looking up to his face. "Oh, he is much better," said their *thakurmohashoy*. "I trust he will soon come round."—"When may I go down to Calcutta?" asked Svarna much relieved of her anxiety.

"When your brother gets perfectly well. You can understand why I object to your going there now. But why, Svarna, aren't you comfortable here?"

"Oh, I am quite comfortable. Only I think if my brother were with me now, I would take good care of him."

"Depend on me, he is taken as good care of just now as one could wish. There is a boy there called Gopal, who keeps night and day by his side. Indeed he is most diligent in his attentions to him. Why, I think he is the best and gentlest boy I have ever seen."

Svarna was extremely happy to hear Gopal so highly spoken of. She said no more ; and Shashanka retired to rest for a little time. After that he came out, walked to the door, and, calling his servant, ordered him to fetch their neighbour Haridas Mukherjee.

Haridas quickly appeared. "Friend Haridas," said Shashanka, "I want to have a talk with you."

"What about ?" asked Haridas.

"You will know presently, but we must be alone. Come along with me, please." And the two strolled out together in the direction of the river. The sun had gone

down, and, while in the western sky a flush still lingered, there was the moon peeping above the horizon in the east. It was the time of spring, and the sweet scent of some wild flowers was in the air. A little way down, the river made a sweet murmuring noise as on it flowed to join the distant sea. It was indeed the most delightful time of evening when there might be many pouring out their hearts in sweet communion with the Great Maker of the universe. But let us see what talk Shashanka and Haridas were going to have now.

Having reached the river-side they sat down on the grass. "Come, make haste, it is night already, and I have my *sandhya* to do," said Haridas.

"Why, you mustn't be in a hurry," said Shashanka. "I am about to refer to a subject equally important to us both."

"I really don't see where you are coming."

"Well, then I must come to the point at once. That Burdwan girl—the same to whom you were so anxious to marry your son—is now living with my wife."

"With your wife! How so? But go on."

"Bipradas, you know, was a very good fellow. You must remember what his reply was to the letter I had written him months ago when he was living. Why, his very words were, 'Since you recommend this young man there should be no objection.' No doubt he had a great regard for me, but it must be said that he was a little too fond of his son."

"I know all that."

"Patience. Had his son not been in the way, he would have been glad to contract an alliance with you."

"That's nothing new to know."

"Patience is a very good thing, my

friend. Well, Bipradas had several other offers, but he liked not one of them. He was a man of the old school, and he cared more for money than for anything else in the world."

"Then why was not my son preferred? Though I am not rich, at least I have competence."

"True; but as I have told you, he was a most indulgent father and could never like to oppose his own beloved son. The son argued that as Svarna's portion was sufficient to make her comfortable in life, she should be given in marriage to a promising young man, though he be poor."

"My son is all that and more. He is a B. A., and you must own he is handsome too."

"Well, if people saw with your eyes, your son would be the handsomest young man in the world."

Haridas looked up as if he was offended

“Don’t take any offence, my friend,” said Shashanka. “I do not mean to say that your son is unhandsome. On the contrary I think he has every right to aspire to the hand of the daughter of my *sisya*. But——”

“But what ?” said Haridas, seeing that he hesitated to speak out his mind.

“I fear you would be offended with me if I were to say it.”

“Why should I be offended ? Speak it, please.”

“Well, if I must speak the truth, your son cannot hold a candle to the boy Hem would have his father pitch upon.”

“You certainly disparage my son who is a B. A.”

“If you saw the boy, you would not say so. I have seen the boy myself, and I consider him the gentlest and prettiest lad in teens I ever set eyes upon. Such bright intelligent eyes he has ! Indeed he

is a very promising lad and feels a mighty pleasure for learning."

"Then why would Bipradas not give his daughter in marriage to this best of boys in the world?"

"Why, haven't I told you that he was more a respecter of wealth than of person? And the boy's father is in the humblest of circumstances. Yet, you know, Bipradas wanted time to consider, and would, if he had lived, have surely yielded to the wishes of his beloved son."

"The son is free to do as he likes now that the father is dead."

"Well, yes, but the boy has little or no chance now."

"Why?" said Haridas looking eagerly up to the face of Shashanka.

"Now listen." And Shashanka drew himself up and looked his companion straight in the face. "Now listen," he repeated. "Hem is confined to his bed

by smallpox. The doctor says there is very little hope. Well, if his case proves fatal, about which there seems to be no doubt, why, then the boy has not the least chance in the world. For the old lady, poor Bipradas's mother, you know, is not to contract an alliance but with one who has got plenty of money."

"And do you think I have any chance in that case?"

"I believe I have a great influence with the old lady."

"Well, that's good, but the young man must first die."

"I will tell you what. He cannot live longer than three days at best. So when he is gone, you may be quite sure of the girl and her money. For, believe me, I can easily conciliate the old lady."

"But a man may go as far as death's door and yet live."

"Well, if the young man should live, though there are a thousand chances to one against that—."

"Why, then I think we are not to think of it at all," said Haridas, interrupting him.

"Not so, I should know what to do in that case."

"What do you mean?" asked Haridas.

"I can secretly join their hands, and in such a clever way as you can never think of."

"How is that possible unless you can get the girl here, and in your own house too, which, I believe, is a very difficult thing to achieve?"

"That is none of your lookout. If you can rely on me, I promise you will have what you want."

"But the question is how you can get the girl in your house."

"No, but rather what you can pay for this business."

Shashanka was capable of any amount of wrong for money. Haridas knew it well, but he knew also that he was full of cunning and deceit. He, therefore, said, "I must first see the girl or I must wash my hands of it."

"Well, I will bring you to see the girl, but before I undertake this business I must know what you can pay."

"What do you want?" said Haridas.

"What do I want? Why, I am sure it is such a business that no one can enough pay for it."

"That may be true," said Haridas; "but I cannot pay more than a thousand rupees."

"You speak like a child," said Shashanka, laughing.

"Why?"

"What's that sum in the will, pray?"

"What does it matter?" said Haridas.

"I haven't got it. And there is many a

slip between the cup and the lip, you know. But I may tell you that it is not for that that I am willing to have this girl for my daughter-in-law."

"Oh, certainly not. You are willing to accept her as your daughter-in-law, because she is a poor little orphan, having neither beauty nor a friend to stand by her."

"Oh, no, no," said Haridas, laughing.

"Why, I think I am not too dull to see your noble intention. And you talk of paying me a thousand rupees, because I am willing to act as the girl's party. You are such a noble-minded man!"

"Oh, you are facetious, but I was only joking," said Haridas, breaking again into a short laugh.

"Then will you truly tell me what you can pay?"

"Truly, five thousand rupees. That is the utmost I can pay."

"Oh, you are joking still, I can see."

"No, not joking. I am really in earnest. Why, do you see, there is not more than fifteen thousand rupees in the will ; and then just think of the trouble and expense I should have to be at, for there is no avoiding a lawsuit to get this business done. The brother of the girl will never forgive our playing such a trick as this, but will be sure to go to law, and thus a portion of the money, that will come to me by my son's marriage with the girl, will be frittered away in lawyers' bills. Besides, a litigation means a hundred other things to pay for, you know. And what shall I have left after all this expense, if I have to pay you more than five thousand ?"

"And do you think the brother will spare me if he should get well at all ? Not he. He is a hot tempered youth very unlike your son, meek and gentle

as a lamb ; and he cares not the least bit for me, though I am their *guru*. He has everything English about him, and even in matters of food and drink, he is no less an Englishman. Why, his English books have taught him nothing good. If I need dread any one, I have most need to dread such a character as this. Yet if I have half the girl's portion in the will, I will do the business for you, and I care not for what may follow."

"Half the sum ! That's rather hard, you see."

"Well, if you think so, let us say no more about it." And Shashanka rose as though he meant to be going. .

"Come, come, be reasonable," said Haridas, taking hold of his hand and making him sit down again.

"What I have asked is quite consistent with reason. I will not take less, you may depend on that. But if you cannot agree

to my terms, why, we had better drop the matter for good and all."

"Well, well, I will consider and let you know to-morrow. But what about the girl? You must let me see her."

"You are welcome to have a look at her this evening if you like."

"This evening? you don't mean it."

"I do though. Am I the man to joke?"

Shashanka and Haridas went down to the water's edge to perform their evening devotions.

Shashanka, who worshipped nothing truly but money, touched the water three or four times, and having finished in a wonderfully short time, rose as he spoke to Haridas, saying, "Make haste, my friend."

Haridas was quickly ready for going home with Shashanka; and when he had seen the girl, he said to himself, "Why, she is quite in Shashanka's grasp."

CHAPTER XXXVIII

SVARNA FINDS HERSELF A PRISONER IN SHASHANKA'S HOUSE

HEM now was convalescent. However, he was not able as yet to leave his bed. Night and day Gopal kept him company as before. He was to feed him with his own hand, he was to wipe his face, he was to talk to him. His company was as balm to Hem Chandra, for whom it was impossible to love his friend more than he did now.

Every morning, while Hem was confined to his bed, Shashanka would travel by train to Calcutta to see him, and return before dark the same day. For this Svarna's grandmother felt very very thankful. How was it possible for the old lady to see through his garb of benevolence ?

As for Svarna she could not be enough thankful for it. Was it a small kindness,

as she thought, that rather than make any other arrangements he should for himself go and see him every day, which meant a journey of several miles, and not at all mind the trouble? And each day, when it was near time for Shashanka to come home, she would go and wait at the door to look out for him; and when she but saw him at a distance, she would run to meet him and inquire of him about her brother. Could anyone have taken a more lively interest in their affairs? Was not Shashanka the greatest of their well-wishers in the world? So indeed she thought him, and so she told him one day. The deep gratitude, which she felt towards him, and which she could not express without crying, was a reproach to his guilty mind. He could not look on her, a simple artless girl, but in contrast with his own hypocritic self. A wretch as he was, he thought he was going to do her a

great wrong, but it was only for a moment ; and then as he could hardly resist the temptation of gold, he laughed at his own weakness, as he called it, as he rose and proceeded to see his neighbour, Haridas.

"What are you about ? Writing ?" said he to Haridas, seeing him.

"Oh, sit down, please. Only some accounts. Two minutes more and I have done."

"Well," observed Shashanka, "you have no time to lose. You must be ready as quickly as you can."

"Oh, never fear ; but you, I must say, are a little too hard upon me."

"Let me know once for all what you can pay," said Shashanka.

"Six thousand rupees."

"Well, I accept your offer, for really I don't like haggling. The day after to-morrow, mind, is the day fixed for your son's marriage with the girl. So in the

meantime be ready, and good-bye till we meet again on the wedding night."

Svarna was in quite good spirits. For was not her brother gradually recovering, and did she not daily have tidings of him? Why, she hoped that in a fortnight or so she would be allowed to go down to Calcutta to live with her own dear brother? Oh, how cheering was the thought! She was up quite fresh every morning, ate her food with relish, and seemed to greatly enjoy the company of the girls of the neighbourhood. Such a sweet gentle girl! Little did she dream that Shashanka, whom she thought to be their greatest wellwisher in the world, was but a wolf in sheep's clothing, that he had been secretly negotiating with Haridas, and was so bad indeed as to be prepared to do her an irreparable injury for money.

Night came on apace; and, according to his wont, Shashanka now left the house,

and bent his steps towards the river-side to perform his evening *sandhya*. Shortly after, as usual, his children fell asleep, with the exception of one, a sturdy boy of three or four years old, who rather capriciously taking it into his head not to go to sleep without Svarna, and whining and fretting persistingly, his mother was obliged to call to her. As Svarna appeared, "This naughty boy," said she, "has thoroughly made up his mind not to go to sleep without you ; so will you stay here for a little while, my child ?"

Svarna went to him, and the boy at once held his peace, and quickly fell asleep. A cool gentle breeze was blowing, and sleep almost imperceptibly stole upon her.

On his return, at the usual hour, Shashanka went to his wife. "Who is there with the *khoka* ?" said he to her.

"Svarna," answered his wife.

"Is she awake or asleep?" he said in a whisper.

Svarna was wide awake now, for she waked almost as soon as Shashanka set foot on the house. But she shut her eyes again and pretended to be asleep now that she heard whispers near the door. Shashanka's wife approached the bed. "Asleep," she whispered, stooping over to ascertain.

"Then just come here to me," said Shashanka in an undertone.

As his wife returned to him, "Look here," said he, speaking as before, "do you see these two keys? The one belongs to the *sadur* (the usual entrance to the house), and the other to the *khirki* (back-door). Both these doors I have locked. Now, you are to keep a sharp eye and see that no one tries to get out of the house by any other means."

"What do you mean? Why should any

one be not allowed to get out of the house?" said his wife with some surprise.

"That's none of your business to know."

"I must know or I will make a fuss."

"Well, well," said Shashanka, laughing defiantly, "I shouldn't care at all if you knew it." Then in a cold business-like way he acquainted his wife with the atrocious business he had undertaken to do, which simply filled her with horror.

"Why, what a look is here!" said Shashanka again, eying his wife significantly. "But I don't at all care for your feelings. And, now, mark me," he added, giving her a savage look, "if the game should escape, I will—, but I need not say it." And Shashanka walked off to the outer house.

Svarna's feelings at what she overheard may be more easily conceived than described. It was impossible for her to feign to be asleep any longer, so she gave

the child by her side a pinch in the arm. As he instantly woke up with a shrill outcry of pain, Svarna, like one disturbed in his sleep, moved, rubbed her eyes, and slowly raised herself up in bed. "You fell asleep, child?" said Shashanka's wife. "Yes, mother," said Svarna. And she rose and abruptly left the room. Coming away she at once ran to the back-door. She found it locked. She turned and ran to the *sadur darja*. This was locked from outside. Oh, what should she do! Like a bird shut up in a cage she fluttered and flew this way and that, but in vain. She was a close prisoner in the house, and Shashanka was a monster who meant to eat her up. She could never have believed that he was no better than a monster, but she could not disbelieve her own ears. To her the house seemed to have the look of a dungeon dark and dismal, whose very air was poisonous, and she longed to

breathe out of it. Full of horror she ran back to the room she had so recently left ; and as she sank down on the floor she looked so ghastly that Shashanka's wife was frightened to look on her. "Why," she cried, "what's the matter with you, Svarna ?"

It was impossible for her to suppress her feelings. "I have overheard every word," she cried, bursting into tears. "Oh ! take my life. It is better not to be than live to be miserable."

The soul of Shashanka's wife melted into pity. She left her boy whom she had put to sleep again, and went to Svarna. "Don't weep, my child," she said, speaking very kindly ; "I will contrive to free you from the clutches of my cruel husband."

"Will you ? do you promise ? Oh, be kind to me." And Svarna clung to her feet and wept piteously. Shashanka's wife drew her to her side, and wiped the tears

from her eyes and spoke words of comfort to her. And when Svarna was comforted a little, she said, "Can you write, my child?"

"A little," said Svarna.

"Won't you be able to write a letter?"

"I hope I shall; but to whom to write? Brother is too weak to get out of bed yet."

"Is there no one else to whom you can write?"

Svarna blushed and hung down her head. "I cannot find," she said.

"Why, what's the name of that boy? Yes, Gopal, I recollect it now. He is a clever lad I am told. Why not write to him?"

Deeper now was the blush on her face. "I think I had better write to my brother," she murmured.

"What's the good of writing to your brother? He cannot take any active part now that he is confined to his bed."

"No, but he will be sure to show my letter to Gopal *dada*."

"Well, then you may write to your brother." With this the good woman rose and left her. She quickly appeared again with the writing materials, and Svarna commenced at once and finished her letter in a little time. The next morning, almost the first thing Shashanka's wife did was to take the maid-servant into her confidence; and secretly handing the letter she bade her put it in the post office on her way to the bazaar.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

CONFINEMENT OF GOPAL.

ALTHOUGH Svarna's letter was due to reach its destination before 10 o'clock in the morning next day, somehow or other it was delayed on the way and did not show itself till so late as 4 o'clock in the evening. Gopal received the letter, and read Hem Chandra's name on the cover. Where was the letter from? Those previously received from home were all written by the *gamasta*, but this was in a different hand. A female style of handwriting, but very neat and legible. Could it be Svarna's hand? He had never seen it before. But if it was, wasn't she as clever as she was pretty?

"Here is a letter for you, *dada*," said Gopal, going to Hem Chandra. Hem took it. "It is from Svarna, read it, Gopal," said he, handing back the letter.

Gopal opened the letter with a trembling heart. As he read it to himself his face grew red and his eyes flashed fire. He never could have dreamed that Shashanka was capable of such baseness. Happily Hem Chandra's eyes were not on him, and he observed not the visible signs of indignation in his face. Gopal, however, made an effort to put on an easy face, and when Hem asked to know what she had written, he only said, as he put back the letter into its cover, "He has asked after you and is very anxious to come here." Hem asked no more, only changed his side and quietly went to sleep. Gopal felt that he had no time to lose, and he quickly appeared before the old lady and communicated the contents of the letter to her. So great indeed was her indignation at what she heard that she cursed Shashanka and called him a rascal, and swore that he should rue his rascality.

Gopal begged her not to make any fuss, lest Hem, knowing, should get greatly excited and fall ill again. He said that as it was past four, and the marriage was to take place at 6 o'clock in the evening, he must start at once so that he might arrive in time to prevent it. He quickly dressed, and stick in hand, boldly set off for the Howrah station to catch the 4-30 train from there. He had scarcely gone fifty paces when it occurred to him that he had forgotten to take any money with him. He went back in a moment. "Quick, quick, let me have some money," said he, earnestly, before the old lady. She promptly opened her cash-box and handed him a twenty rupee note. Without looking at it he thrust it into his breast pocket, and, only wishing her to tell his *dada* that he had left for Bhwanipore on some urgent business, and might not be back till next day, set off again with great haste.

A little way on he met a hackney carriage coming. "Stop, stop," said he to the driver. And as the man drove up and pulled up his horses, he jumped in. "To the Railway steamer ghât," he cried. "And I will give you a good *bakshish*, if I can catch the 4-30 train."

The horses were strong, and as the man lashed them furiously, they dashed along at a great gallop. In a very short time the steamer ghat was reached. Gopal jumped out. But when he found that the old lady had given him a twenty-rupee note, he was puzzled. He must have change, and he bustled up and down, for there was the steamer, that ferried passengers taking train at the Howrah station, all ready to start. In the midst of his great perplexity, some one took him across the street to a man, from whom change was to be procured. "Give me change, quick," said he to the money-changer

as he handed him the twenty-rupee note. When he received the change, he paid five rupees to the driver, and dashed on in hot haste to the steamer. Just then the signal to start was given, and it was followed by a loud long whistle. He pressed forward with all the speed he could make. But when he stood upon the jetty, the steamer had distanced it, and was noisily moving in her course with her full complement of passengers.

There was not a minute to lose, and Gopal ran down to the ferry, and sprang on one of the boats lying there. "It is some minutes past four," said he, slipping a rupee into the ferryman's hand, "and I want to catch the 4-30 train. So look sharp, my friend."

"Sit you there, sir," said the ferryman, "and I will row you across in the shortest possible time." Gopal was soon being rowed across, and quickly reached the

Howrah side. Just then there was a loud sharp whistle of the train. Gopal landed in a trice. The ferryman asked to be paid, but he hurried on without paying any heed to his words. The fellow, however, would not have it so, and quickly went and put himself before his way. "I have paid you already," impatiently cried Gopal. "The *bakshish* only, sir," said the ferryman. Gopal, to get rid of him, paid him another one rupee and ran to the station. He had just gained the platform when the train got in motion. Like a desperate man he sprang forward, opened the door of one of the compartments of a carriage by turning the handle, and got inside. He could not get his ticket. What did that matter? He could pay the fare where he wanted to get down.

On entering the compartment, Gopal's head was in a whirl, there was a blur before his eyes, and he caught hold of

the iron railing to prevent himself from falling. For weeks together he had gone without his proper nourishment and his natural rest at night ; and now the desperate effort made by him in his weakened state of body to catch the train was too much for him. Slowly and softly he laid him down on the bench. There was a cool gentle wind blowing, and as the train moved on, for his exhaustion he fell asleep.

He slept and awoke not till too late. Never had he slept so soundly before. And while he slept, numbers of passengers got in and out till at length the train arrived at Burdwan at 9 o'clock at night. The doors of carriages were being opened, and tickets were being collected. It was all bustle and confusion at the station, yet still he slept. At length a Eurasian Railway officer opened the door of the compartment in which he was. Gopal

was alone in the compartment. Seeing that he was asleep, the ticket collector pulled him gently by the leg, saying, "Get up, babu, get up." Gopal got up with a start. "This is Sreerampur?" he asked.

"You are dreaming," said the Eurasian officer. "This is Burdwan. Give me your ticket, come on."

Gopal's head was again in a whirl, and his feelings seemed to choke his utterance.

"Quick, give me your ticket; why don't you move?" said the Railway officer.

"I haven't got any, but I am ready to pay the fare," gasped out Gopal.

"I suspected as much," said he. "Come along with me to the Station-master."

As the Station-master was too busy, Gopal had to be shut up in a room for the night.

Oh, that was a terrible night to Gopal! "Must I," sighed he, "give up the thought of Svarna for good!" Though Gopal had

heard nothing, yet he had fondly cherished in his heart the hope that one day Svarna would be his own. But that she was another's now, and he must no more think of her—oh ! the thought he could not bear. "Why did I not communicate," he exclaimed in an agony of grief, "the contents of her letter to *dada* ! He might have been able to take prompt measures to frustrate Shashanka's design and rescue Svarna from his hands. Oh, why did I fall asleep ! How can I return home to *dada* ! How can I look him in the face again ! He has been a most loving brother to me, but oh ! how I have wronged him ! By falling asleep I have allowed an irreparable injury to be done to Svarna, for which I can never forgive myself. The dissembling wretch ! The rascally Shashanka ! but who ever thought him capable of such baseness as this ! *Dada* will be distracted with grief and rage when he

hears it. Svarna, at this moment, is no doubt blaming her brother ; but, oh ! she knows not that it is my unfortunate self that is to blame for it."

Thus sorrowing and lamenting he passed the night, and he never felt the least concern for his own confinement. "I shall be set free," said he to himself, "as soon as it is morning ; but, alas ! I have failed to free Svarna from the clutches of the bad Shashanka."

CHAPTER XL

SVARNA'S NARROW ESCAPE

THERE is great *dhoomdham* in Haridas's house. The father of the bridegroom has procured a band from Calcutta. The yard of the outer house is full, the boys filling the greater part of it and making the very air ring with their mirth. The bridegroom, an ill-favoured youth of twenty-four, with a rough dark exterior, has a rather repulsive look in his wedding *chêli* of a bright-red colour. He has a seat in the midst of a merry group chiefly composed of students.

Brides and bridegrooms have always the tenderest attentions paid to them on the day of their marriage. The friends and relations of the bridegroom are most diligent in their attentions to him. Every one seems to feel proud of being talked to by the bridegroom, and every acquaint-

ance is anxious to thrust himself upon his notice. Those who have often seen him from a boy are as eager to see him now as those who are perfect strangers to him. The bridegroom has to be called away sometimes when his presence is required in the *andermahal*; and on every such occasion he pretends to be very unwilling to leave the company of his friends.

"You are not to take any food to-day," said Shashanka to Svarna, calling her early this morning.

"Why?" said Svarna, looking as though she were unable to understand his meaning.

"Why? Because you are going to be married to-day," said Shashanka, breaking into a horrid laugh, which startled and frightened Svarna.

Shashanka was a man of gigantic appearance, and Svarna now really began to feel she was in the hands of a giant, from whom there was no running away.

"Yes, because you are going to be married to-day," repeated Shashanka ; and he laughed as horridly again.

Svarna's fear at once changed to anger. Burning with indignation that quite drowned her sense of decency, she exclaimed, "Who is to marry me and to whom am I to be married ?"

"I am to marry you," said Shashanka, speaking very calmly, "though it would have been none of my concern had your father been living. I need not tell to whom you are going to be married, for you overheard every word of what I had lately been saying to my wife."

Svarna's surprise was as great as her indignation ; for how could Shashanka, unless through some mysterious process, know that she only feigned to be asleep when he had a talk with his wife the other night ? "Such a good and kind guru-

thakur you are !" she, however, said in a bitterly sarcastic tone.

"I may be a bad man," said Shashanka, "but your father approved this match, you may depend on that."

"My father ! no, never. It is a lie."

"Well, never mind your father, since he is not amongst the living. This match, you may know, has *my* approval and sanction."

"What does it signify whether it has *your* sanction or not ?"

"Well, but I am sure we can never find a more eligible match than this. The young man, I tell you, is worth his weight in gold."

"What care I for what the young man is. I will not have him. There is no compulsion in things of this kind."

"Well, it is very pretty indeed. I like not girls that are self-willed. And what makes them so is often the little learning

that they get, and that is so dangerous. Come now, you are to make no fuss, for I will not put up with any nonsense in such a serious affair as this." And Shashanka rose and prepared to leave the room. "Oh, stop," cried Svarna. "What right have you to hold me a prisoner here? Unlock the house-door and let me out, I say. I must go down to Calcutta."

"Well, there is no hurry about it. You can go after the marriage is over."

Svarna rushed to the door, exclaiming, "I will alarm the neighbourhood by crying 'murder!'" She was just about to rush out when Shashanka caught her by the hand and tried to pull her inside. She struggled and pulled the opposite way; but she quickly had to yield to the giant strength of Shashanka, who, standing outside, easily locked the door as he pushed her from him. Svarna screamed and wept and cried, but he only said, "Now, lie there, and cry your

eyes out if you like." With this he quickly went out, and going to Haridas's brought the *dhulis* to his house. "Beat on your *dholes*, my men, and beat away whenever you hear any weeping and wailing in the house."

Svarna wept and entreated and threatened, but all to no purpose.

"Oh, have pity on me," she cried. "Do send me to my brother, and I promise you will have double the sum, for which you are going to do this great wrong. Nay, if you will not be satisfied with that, you shall have the whole of my portion in the will."

"You know not what you say," said Shashanka. "You have not yet acquired the title to this money."

"But I say I will give you my portion, and I do swear to this by all that is sacred."

"All these promises are of no avail. Shashanka Shekhar is not the man to trust in promises."

"What do you want then?"

"I want nothing but to see you smoothly through the ceremony, and then to have done with you altogether."

"You have a daughter, would you like to give her away in this way?"

"Why, it is very fine to hear you talk like that. Let a girl into the mysteries of reading and writing, and you spoil her. That's proverbial."

Svarna was a little abashed and said no more.

Shashanka lived within easy distance of the Railway Station at Sreerampur. Svarna could hear the trains as they approached the station whistling and puffing, and she eagerly expected that some one was going to come to her rescue. And now she said as she heard a low distant noise, "Ah, there is a train coming. It must be from Howrah." And she brightened up at the thought that her

rescue was at hand. For about half an hour she waited patiently, but after that she grew restless and flitted about the room like a caged bird. Presently she stopped to listen. There was another train coming. Could it be from Howrah ? It stopped. It started again and went puffing past. After a time there was another, and then another again, but no welcome messenger came from her brother. Then it seemed to her that the trains were all running to, and not one running from, Howrah.

Time wore on, and at last Svarnalata saw through an open window facing the west that the sun was about to go down. The marriage was to take place at 6 o'clock in the evening. What were her feelings when she thought of that dreadful hour being at hand ! By and by the sun went down, leaving a glow in the western sky, and Svarnalata expected that Shashanka

would soon come to lead her to what she thought would be the death of her. But it suddenly struck her that perhaps Shashanka had not told the truth when he said that her brother was gradually improving and would get perfectly well in right time. Was her brother dangerously ill or had the worst happened? Though the latter she could scarcely think of without a shudder, her mind now misgave her cruelly, and so great indeed was her suffering that for a time she quite forgot her own dangerous position.

The shades of evening deepened. A little cloud came over, sullyng the clear light blue of the sky, a cool breeze blew, and the bridegroom and his party arrived. Then it was all bustle and confusion. In the midst of the blowing of conchs while the band played, the bridegroom was led into the *ashur* made in Shashanka's big *chandimandav*. The seat of honour in

the middle was occupied by the bridegroom, while his friends and relatives sat all round. The young man was encumbered with a superfluous quantity of garland, and had his forehead plentifully smeared with *chandān*. The guests were all merry and talkative, and the boys were very jolly and cracked jokes with the bridegroom. But where was Shashanka now? He was busy counting the money of his bargain with Haridas.

After a while when Shashanka found it was all right, he rose and went to put the money under lock and key; then returning quickly, he joined Haridas, and they went together to the *sabha*. They were well pleased with each other, for everything was as it should be. But it was near time, and Shashanka proposed that he would go and bring the bride. "Yes, go, fetch the bride," cried several voices at once.

Shashanka was off in a moment. As he unlocked and opened the door, Svarna rushed forward and threw herself at his feet. Weeping she said, "Oh, tell me truly how my brother is, or you cannot make me leave this room."

"Your brother is gradually recovering health," said Shashanka, "though he is too weak to leave his bed yet."

"For God's sake speak truly."

"I am telling you nothing but the truth. Your brother will get perfectly well in right time. He cannot get out of his bed yet. If he could, this marriage would never take place. If the worst happened, then I might wait and not be in such haste about this business." Svarna could see that there was some truth in the words which he spoke. So she only said, "Do not, I beseech you, sacrifice me to your greed of gold."

"Nonsense," cried Shashanka.

"Oh, spare me ! If you do not, and marry me to this man's son, I will commit suicide, and you will have my death to reproach yourself with."

"What care I for what you may do after the marriage is over ?" And Shashanka stooped, by main force, to compel Svarna to quit hold of his feet, which she held firmly in both hands. But all of a sudden Svarna let go his feet, and flitted to the farther corner of the room. Getting her *anchal* round her neck, and tying a noose with greatest promptness she stood ready to draw it at a moment's notice. "Stand where you are," she cried ; "if you move a step, I will destroy my life."

"Svarna," cried Shashanka, laughing as a fiend only could laugh, "I am quite sure of you, you cannot escape me."

"You need not be too sure of anything," said Svarna.

"Wicked girl !" cried Shashanka, and

advanced a step or two. "Stop or I will draw in the noose," exclaimed Svarna in a determined tone of voice. And she would have destroyed her life without doubt, had not Shashanka, at that instant, been startled at noticing a sudden blaze lighting up the sky in front of the open window, that made him rush to it in alarm. And what were his surprise and confusion when, on looking out, he saw that his own big *chandimandav* was on fire.

CHAPTER XLI

SHASHIBHUSHAN KNOWS HIS WIFE AS HE NEVER KNEW HER BEFORE

ON his return home from Ram Sundar's, Shashibhushan told his wife how cold had been the reception he had met with there, how the *amlas* had slighted him, and how dearly he was to pay to be spared by them. When his wife had heard all, she shook her head, sighed and said nothing. She then rose, and was just about to leave the room when her husband said, "You are going, my love? Will you not give me a little of your company?"—"I shall be back soon," she only said, and went to seek the company of her precious mother.

What property Shashibhushan possessed was in his wife's name. The house he had built, the lands he had acquired, and such Government paper as he owned were

all in Pramada's name. Besides, what cash he got was in the safe custody of his wife. Nothing could be better than Pramada's having her husband's property in her name. In this she was directed by prudence. While his property was in her name, Shashibhushan might be sure of its being as secure as secure could be. But it would not be quite so secure if he chose to have it in his own name, as then perhaps he would some day be in danger of losing it ; for what might not turn up any day for any man ? Formerly, when he lived jointly with his brother, he used to pay the rent of the whole of the landed property left them by their late father. But after his separation from his brother he paid the rent only of his own half of the property. Bidhubhushan was not able to pay the rent of his share. He was in arrears to the Zamindar ; consequently his property was sold, and afterwards it

was bought back by Shashibhushan in his wife's name.

Ornaments rather than money were Pramada's aim. "Money is quickly spent," Pramada would say to her husband, "but ornaments are a sort of provision in a house against any future pecuniary difficulty." She also used to say that if any one was in any difficulty, which he could get out of by the payment of a certain sum of money, though he might have no money in hand, if his wife had a number of jewels, he should not lose heart. Shashibhushan was ever ready to give Pramada credit for being the most prudent, if not the most peaceful, woman in the village.

Now, as we have seen, when Pramada, after hearing all from her husband, left the room rather abruptly, Shashibhushan's mind misgave him he knew not why. The *amlas* had agreed to spare him on

condition that he should pay them four thousand rupees and afterwards resign his situation. The bribe must be given. Could Pramada be unwilling to let him have the money? Could she possibly forsake him in his time of need? Shashibhushan could never brook such an idea. "No, no," said he, "Pramada is certainly better than that. Why, she cannot let her husband be ruined for ever."

Leaving her husband Pramada went downstairs to her mother. "Is there any one by, mother?" she said in an undertone. Her mother stepped out to look. "No, my love, there is no one by," said she, returning to her daughter. "Then sit here," said Pramada to her, seating herself on the *taktapos*.

Pramada's mother sat close beside her, as she eagerly whispered, "Well, what is it you wish to speak to me in confidence, daughter?"

"Move on and don't lean on me, I say," said Pramada.

"Oh, I beg your pardon, dear, I didn't see," said her mother as she hastened to move aside.

"Why, it is quite easy to say that, but you have a pair of eyes in your head to see just as any one else has."

"I am very sorry, my love."

"Well, have you heard anything, mother?" said Pramada, softening her tone.

"No, my love, I am sure I haven't."

"Why, do you mean to say that you live in the house with your ears stopped with cotton wool?"

"How am I to know anything unless you tell me, dear?"

"Well, then I will tell you. The Sahib came the other day. Do you hear, mother?"

"Sahib?"

"Yes, hold your tongue now. Well, the Dewanji is to render the past ten years' accounts. That means nothing more or less than his ruin, you know."

"His ruin ! Oh, what shall we do then !" exclaimed Pramada's mother.

"Hush ! if you cannot quietly listen to what I have to say, you must leave the room."

"Oh, I can quietly listen, dear. Please excuse this interruption."

Pramada once more forgave her mother, and said, resuming the subject, "Yes, his ruin. He knows he has not been an honest man in the service of his master. And he has unfortunately made enemies of the *amlas*, who are determined now not to spare him. Such faithless rogues these *amlas* are. They could be so daring as to rob their master without pity, because, you know, the master is a dead drunkard and worse than useless. The Sahib of course

is not to spare the Dewanji, as he is the headman. The punishment—why, it may be imprisonment, it may be worse—transportation.”

“Transportation !”

“Yes, far over the sea to a place they call *pulipolou*,* from where there is no returning.”

“Oh pity ! what will become of us ! But is there no help, daughter ?”

“Help ? Yes, but there is no counting on that. The *amlas* can so contrive as to let him escape if he will pay them four thousand rupees in advance. He tells me so, but I believe that’s only to trick him out of the money, for there is no trusting these poor, pitiful, thievish rogues, you know.”

The mother, who had lived all her life in poverty, and had never seen so much as fifty rupees together, looked puzzled at the mention of four thousand rupees. She

* Colloquially, a place to where convicts are sent.

had not the least idea of such a sum as that ; so she dared not open her mouth.

"Well, mother, why do you keep quiet ?" said Pramada.

"What did you say was the sum, dear ?"

"Four thousand rupees."

The mother looked hesitatingly up into her daughter's face. "Is that so much as two score or more ?" she said.

"*Yama* take you ! Are you a child ?"

The mother was silenced.

"Well," said Pramada again, "to pay four thousand rupees is to part with all the jewels, and the Government paper. Now, what do you think, mother."

The poor woman was in a fix. She was not to keep quiet. Yet she knew not what to say so as not to displease her daughter. She could not think what to say when Pramada said again, "Why, it is easy to see that's only one of their tricks, but I am not going to be cheated

out of any money in that way. Yet to stay here there is no avoiding paying the money. The only way out of this difficulty is to flee from here. Let us, I say, take my jewels and all cash and the Government paper, and leave this place as early as possible. Why should I stay here and give up all that I have if, by so doing, we cannot save him from ruin. Save him from ruin we cannot. Why then lose my jewels and all and make beggars of myself and my children? And who will be a beggar, if he can help it?"

"Who of course?" said Pramada's mother at last, now greatly relieved to know what her daughter would have. "Can there be anything more foolish than for any one to give up all that he is worth, and then go and beg from door to door?"

Having concluded that they must leave the house and not delay it longer than

they could help, Pramada rose and went back to her husband.

"Where have you been, dear?" Shashibhushan asked his wife.

"Oh, mother is unwell," said Pramada with a bad pretence.

"Unwell?" Well, but when do you let me have the money, dear?"

"Why," said Pramada, "I should be sure there is no hurry about it. You don't want it to-night."

"No, not to-night," said Shashibhushan, "but I must have it to-morrow."

Pramada said no more, and Shashibhushan dropped the matter for the nonce, thinking that he ought to feel sure of the money from his wife:

Next morning the *kerani* Ram Sundar, accompanied by two *piadas*, called at Shashibhushan's house. As soon as Shashibhushan heard of his arrival he hurried downstairs and gave him a friendly

reception. Then Ram Sundar said, "Well, sir, there has come a manager at last. You are to go with the *piadas* there, for your presence is urgently required at the *kachari*. Now go and bring it, you understand me, and you have nothing to fear from us. You must look sharp, sir, for there is no time to lose."

When Shashibhushan had heard him, he would waste not a minute, but left him immediately. Appearing before his wife, "Now, dear," said he, "give me those papers and some of your jewels as an equivalent for a thousand rupees."

"What! now!" cried Pramada, as though it were quite unexpected.

"Why, dear, it cannot possibly wait," said Shashibhushan.

"Well," said Pramada, "four thousand rupees in itself is a fortune. But what good do you expect from your paying this money?"

"Good, dear? Why, only then I should not be sent off to *pulipolou*."

"You think so," said Pramada, "but who knows you are not going to be sent off to *pulipolou*? Who knows you are not going to be tricked out of your money?"

Shashibhushan looked up in astonishment. "What is my money to me," said he rather bitterly, "if I am going to be sent off to *pulipolou*?"

"It may be nothing to you ; but what I mean is that we should not beg from door to door if it could be helped."

These words sent an arrow into Shashibhushan's heart. "Why should you," said he, "beg from door to door? I have thirty bighas of good rent-free land yielding abundant crops of rice. I have also other landed property. And I have built this house which will not need repairs within some twenty years hence. But come, why should we not hope the best?"

Do please let me have the Government paper and some of your jewellery, and I can assure you things will soon be all right again."

Pramada neither moved nor spoke a word. "Oh, come," said Shashibhushan again, speaking coaxingly, "be quick, love. There is no time to lose. Now, get up, do, there is a good dear."

Pramada was still sullen. Her husband got annoyed. "Get up I say," he cried, "will you or will you not?"

"Why, how you storm!" said Pramada, taking advantage of her husband's somewhat ruffled mood. "Do you mean to lay violent hands on me? Go to! I refuse to give you."

"A thousand pardons, dear, ten thousand pardons. There is Ram Sundar Babu waiting for the money, and I am to go just now with the *piadas* there. Oh, come, make haste, dear, and don't let us

trifle time, for I cannot now afford to lose a minute."

"Oh, you are such a hard-hearted man," exclaimed Pramada, weeping. "For sometime your brother had given me much trouble, and now *you* are determined not to let me alone. What a pity. I must never enjoy one moment of my life. Why could my father not have known better than to contract an alliance with your father!" And Pramada covered her eyes with her *anchal* and wept. Shashibhushan only stood like one struck stupid. "You never cared about making any provision for me," she said again, weeping, "and now you are going for good."

"Oh, Pramada," exclaimed Shashibhushan in agony, "I should not—I must not go, only if you would let me have the money. But is it possible you are not willing to let me have it?" Pramada only sobbed as though her heart would burst.

"Make haste, Shashi Babu, we cannot afford to wait any longer," bawled Ram Sundar Babu from downstairs.

"I am coming," cried Shashibhushan. And falling on his knees before his wife, and weeping, he begged and entreated her to have pity on him.

At this Pramada uttered a shriek such as made her mother run to her. "Oh, father! oh, mother! why could you have brought me into this bad world! Why could you have given me in marriage to such a heartless man!"

"Oh, dear, don't blame me," cried Pramada's mother. "I was dead against it, but your father would have his own way and not listen to me, and so you were married against your poor mother's will, dear. But my life has become a burden to me, and I have no desire to live any longer. Oh, Gadadhar! Gadadhar! And do I still live without you, child!" And

mother and daughter mingling their tears, wept aloud as though they were resolved upon Shashibhushan's ruin.

"What do you mean, Shashi Babu?" cried Ram Sundar Babu again. "Do you mean to keep us standing in this way? We have waited over half an hour and will not wait one minute more."

Shashibhushan now felt that he was a lost man. "Woman," he cried in a tone of voice which showed that he was prepared for the worst, "I never had thought you could treat me in this way, but you are up to anything. You poisoned my ears against my brother, and I was a fool indeed, as you often indirectly called me, to believe you. To think of all my brother had to suffer, because you would have him crushed and trampled under foot——oh, that is enough to break my heart. Poor Sarala! she was so very good, but *you* have murdered her. And when it

was all over with her, I could feel that something dreadful was going to happen to me. You are a murderous woman, but I must suffer for my own folly. Can one cherish a viper in his breast and not be bitten by it?"

When he had spoken those words, for a moment he looked wildly round, and then abruptly left the room. Going to Ram Sundar, he said, "I will go with you before the manager." And when he stood before him, to the great surprise of the *amlas*, he confessed his past transgressions and said that he might do with him as he liked.

The manager was a Deputy Collector. He felt some commiseration for Shashibhushan, but he must do his duty. So he took note of all his confessions to him. The *amlas* and the *kerani* Ram Sundar were all of them found more or less guilty; and they were ordered with Shashibhushan

to the *hajat*. The Deputy Collector next thought that as Shashibhushan's offence was very grave, his property should be sold to compensate the loss of the Zamin-dar ; and in view of this, lest any of the movables should be removed, this cautious officer ordered the police to keep a strict watch at night over Shashibhushan's house.

Well, it was dark. The *daraga* with a constable had just arrived. This constable was no other than Ramesh, with whom the reader is well acquainted. Suddenly now the sky became overcast with a cloud ; and immediately after the wind rose, shaking the trees and making a great bustle. It, however, fell quickly, and on then came a shower of rain. The rain was soon over, but the air felt rather cold. Not a very pleasant business to keep watch in such a night, and toward the close of winter when the cold yet

lingered. The *daraga* was not accustomed to such a business ; so after having been on duty for about an hour he began to feel rather cold and uncomfortable. "Ramesh," he said, calling his assistant, "I am cold and uneasy."

"I am always at your service, sir," said Ramesh. "You have only to tell me what you want done, and it is done."

"Well, then a half *powa*, my friend, and that will do, I think."

Ramesh was off in an instant. In a little time he returned. The *daraga* took the bottle from his hand. Then into the mouth of it he put his finger, at the same time slanting the bottle so as to allow the liquor to flow to its mouth. Then taking out his finger, as he set the bottle by, he held it across the flame of his lighted Bull's eye. The liquor of the finger, however, failed to catch the flame, which showed that the liquor was not good.

"The fellow Ramdhan," said he, "is not afraid to cheat a policeman !" As he, however, was about to take a sip, a voice cried, "Ramesh, Ramesh." Ramesh went off at once to find the person. When he returned, the *daraga* had finished his half *powa*. "Here, Ramesh," said the *daraga*, handing back the empty bottle, "another half *powa* if you please, but take care, friend, you are not cheated again."

In short when the *daraga* had finished his second half *powa*, he began to dream of beds of down. And he thought he would stretch himself on one of them when overpowered by the influence of liquor he measured his full length on the ground. When Ramesh saw that the *daraga* was down and senseless, he quickly approached Shashibhushan's house, and walking up, knocked gently at the door. In a moment the door opened and Ramesh got in.

Pramada, according to a previous arrangement with Ramesh, having taken all her jewels and all cash of her husband in the cash-box, was now waiting all ready with her mother for that rogue of a policeman to come and lead them out of the house. "You are ready?" whispered Ramesh as he entered. "Yes," said Pramada's mother in a whisper. "I will walk a little way with you to see you off," said Ramesh, speaking again in whispers. "Now then follow me."

Pramada had charge of her cash-box while her mother had charge of a pretty large bundle of clothes. Thus equipped they followed Ramesh out of the house.

A little way on they stopped, and Pramada's mother paid Ramesh what he had been promised.

Alone and in the darkness of night they made fast in the direction of the river. From the first, her mind made up to go

to her father's, Pramada had hired a boat. So on arriving, they found it ready waiting for them. In a minute they were seated in the boat, and in another they were on the way to their destination. But scarcely had they left ten minutes when a cloud again overspread the sky, deepening the gloom of night. The wind rose again ; and often a flash of lightning was followed by a deep rumbling noise of thunder. But soon a deeper gloom prevailed, and the wind was furious now. The heavens looked as though they would come down and crush the earth with their tremendous weight. Then came on hail and rain together, and the fury of the wind now knew no bounds. Trees were blown down and birds dropped dead into the river. A shriek broke at once from Pramada and her mother, and the next instant they were struggling amid the foaming waves. The boatmen swam to the bank

which was close. Pramada's mother supporting herself on her bundle of clothes, in spite of the wind and waves, boldly pushed on to the bank till she too gained it. As for Pramada, in one hand she firmly held her cash-box while with the other she swam as best as she could. She had thus come near enough to the bank when she was so cold and exhausted that she could no longer hold her cash box ; and as her grasp relaxed, down it went at once. And then she would have gone down without doubt, but a wave coming on, leaping, after her, threw her upon the bank and there let her lie.

CHAPTER XLII

SHASHANKA'S DEATH

WHEN Shashanka Shekhar found his *chandimandav* in a blaze, for a minute he stood astounded; and then as the force of the flames grew greater, he hurried out of the room and ran toward the fire. On opening the door, he had put the lock and key near the window, and now in his moments of great perplexity he had no thought of it or of Svarna. When Shashanka was off, Svarna looked out of the window and saw the *chandi-mandav* all in a blaze. At the same instant one of the thatched houses, that was nearest, caught the flame, and Svarna trembled as she saw it. Then what a strain was there to save life and property! What a great stir and tumult, and what clamorous crowds blocked up the pathway in front of the burning houses! Svarna

now thought it was high time to make her escape. Here was an opportunity such as she never had dreamed of, and she was not to let it go for the world. She ran to the *sadur daraja*. Perceiving, however, a crowd in front of it she turned and ran to the back-door ; but her foot slipped, and she fell down and hurt herself. It was a struggle for life and liberty. She nothing minded her pain ; and right glad was she when she found the back-door open. She sallied forth and came before a crowd, but she ran quickly past it. Then on she pressed, no matter in what direction, her only care being to get as far away as she could from Shashanka's house. It was not long before she came to where two paths lay before her, one to the right and the other to the left. Here for a moment she hesitated, and then turned to the left and went on. She had not gone on for five minutes when she felt the touch of a

hand on her shoulder from behind. She screamed, and ran some paces before her. Her fright, however, wore off when she found it was only a woman. The woman laughed, walked up and spoke to her. Then Svarna knew her to be Shashanka's maid-servant. Thinking she had been sent to chase and take her, she was again seized with a fright. "Oh, let me go or I will scream," cried Svarna ; "I will not go back with you."—"Fear nothing," said Shashanka's maid-servant. "I haven't been sent to take you. I have run away like you from the wicked Shashanka. Look here," she added, showing her a cash-box, "I have stolen it from him." Svarna had now no reason to disbelieve her. "Where are you going now ?" she asked.

"To my aunt's," said the maid-servant.

"Where does your aunt live ?"

"Away over the river. I mean to stop

there for to-night. To-morrow I will go elsewhere. I would wish you to go with me."

Svarna readily agreed to her proposal. They then struck into a by-path; and after threading this and that narrow way for a time they at length reached the river-side. But they had to wait a long time before they could be carried over.

"I trust I am safe now," said Svarna as after landing they walked on together.

"Yes, you are safe," said the maid-servant; "but I am not as yet so safe as you are."

"I wish you had not robbed your master."

"Why, I have only served him right. I wish I had cut his throat too. Such a scoundrel he is! Was there ever in the world a greater scoundrel than he is! He is hoarding up money by robbing other people. And where is the sin in robbing a man whose business is to rob other people?"

“Well, but how did you steal the cash-box?”

“I knew the chest in which he kept his cash. I often had looked for an opportunity to run away with his cash-box, but in vain. This evening when he entered your room, I saw him leave the lock and key out near the window. I thought I would steal the key, for I had often seen him open that chest with it. Well, while he was in I couldn't find courage enough to take it. But when, on seeing his *chandimandar* on fire, he left the room in great haste, I said to myself, 'now or never.' So at once I went and got the key. Then opening the chest, and taking out the cash-box, which felt pretty heavy, I quickly made with it toward the back-door. Just then I saw you run to the *sadur daraja*. I had the key of the back-door, so I was able to get off in a moment. Immediately after, you found the back-

door open and got off too. But you were soon some way ahead, for more than once I had to skulk to avoid people hurrying in crowds in the direction of the fire. And when at length I came up with you, I thought. I would just surprise you; so I crept up and touched you lightly on the shoulder. But you were so frightened, for you thought I had been sent on after you." And here the maid-servant broke into a loud laugh.

"Indeed I thought you had been sent to pursue me," said Svarna.

They talked as they went on, and at last the maid-servant cried, "Do you see yonder hut? My aunt dwells there."

"How am I to go down to Calcutta? To-morrow I shall have to cross the river again to take train."

"You need have no concern about that. To-morrow morning we shall see what can be done for you."

As we have seen, from the room in which Svarnalata was Shashanka first noticed the fire. In a room adjoining the *chandimandav* there was a *taktapos*, in the middle of which was a door with a keyhole in it. This door, when unfastened, could be lifted like the lid of a box. Into this repository, a little while before the *chandimandav* caught fire, Shashanka had put the money of his bargain with Haridas. At first when he noticed the fire, his confusion was very great, but afterwards he quickly ran towards it. It was the month of Falgoun, and everything combustible was as dry as anything. First somehow or other the room adjoining the *chandimandav* took fire. Quickly after the *chandimandav* was in a blaze. Then the flames spread fast and set two or three adjacent houses on fire too. There was a great rush of men, and great was the uproar. Yet Haridas did not despair of

of his son's marriage. He, holding his son's hand and that of the priest, and keeping at a safe distance, hoped that the marriage might be accomplished when the fire had subsided.

Now, when Shashanka came before the fire, without a moment's delay he rushed into the room where he had kept the money. A bedding was on the *taktapos*, which he flung away with great violence. His money! oh, his money! But where was the key? He fumbled about his waist, but in vain. So he ran back into the house. There was the lock just where he had left it, but without the key on. Oh, how trying it was! In agony he struck his forehead with the palm of his hand and cried, "Oh, I am undone." He ran frantically about for an axe. At length he found one. In great haste he ran back to the *chandimandav*. He was just about to rush again into the room where his money

was when Hāridas caught hold of his *dhuti*. "Where is the bride?" he cried. "Why not go to a neighbour's and there have their hands joined?" Shashanka only lifted the axe over his head as he turned fiercely round. Haridas uttered a shriek and started back in horror. Shashanka then sprang upon the *taktapos* and struck the door of the repository with his axe. It did not give way; so he struck blow upon blow, but in vain. The *taktapos* was made of salwood, and seemed not likely to yield easily. But the flames roared over his head. The mud walls might give way at any moment. He grew most impatient, and struck a blow once again with all his force. The shock made the whole *chandimandav* tremble, when detached from the roof down came a blazing beam upon his shoulder. Instantly he fell heavily upon his axe and was cut deep in the breast. And while the

blood gushed from his wound, the flame of the burning beam quickly set his *dhuti* in a blaze. "Help, help," cried Shashanka in a most piteous tone. "Oh ! drag me out, men, and leave me not to perish in the flames." Not one, however, ventured to risk his own life to save his. Shashanka roared in agony. He was in too woful a plight to help himself, and he repeatedly urged the men outside to save him yet. The mud walls threatened every moment to sink in, and no one was prepared to throw away his own life as he thought. And suddenly now, as the walls gave way, down came with a crash the blazing roof like a huge mass of fire, and Shashanka was buried alive. Thus ended his life.

Haridas, who never had despaired of his son's marriage, now gave up all hopes of it, and returned home much vexed and greatly disappointed. His son perhaps

was not less disappointed, and he too, after lounging about for a time in company with some of his friends, was obliged at last to turn his steps homeward.

CHAPTER XLIII

TRANSPORTATION OF RAMESH

IN the morning following the accident, which happened to Pramada and her mother, intimation was sent to the police of the escape of two females from Shashibhushan's house, and of the sinking of the boat in which they set off. The head-constable, on receiving this intimation, went at once to Shashibhushan's house to confer with the *daraga*. He was so surprised when, on arriving, he found his superior officer not in his senses, and looking, as he lay on the bare ground, like one whose last moments were near. His breathing hard, his limbs stiff, and his eyes fast closed. What was the matter with him? The constable, Ramesh, knew nothing of it. He was at his post at the back-door all night, and he found the *daraga* in this state only after he was

relieved in the morning. Then he heard of the escape of two females from the house, and of the going down of their boat. What on earth could be the matter with the *daraga*? Could he be bitten by a snake? The headconstable very carefully began examining his feet. He, however, could detect nothing like a puncture made by the fangs of a snake. Ramesh then stepped over to his head. "Why, I think his breath has a smell of liquor," cried he, stooping so low as to be very close to his mouth. The headconstable examined for himself. "Quite so," said he.

"I am a policeman, sir," said Ramesh.

"You are indeed a very clever fellow. But what's to be done now? Try such means as may bring him back to his senses?"

"No, nothing of the kind, if you will take my advice."

"Why?" asked the headconstable.

"Why? Because you see, should he never return to his senses, we may be sure to be hauled to court."

"What's your advice then?"

"I would rather have this matter at once brought to the notice of the Deputy Collector."

"That will do him material injury. He will be degraded or may even be dismissed, you know."

"Can't help," said Ramesh. "As one sows, so one must reap."

"So one must reap indeed," said something in Ramesh's heart. And as he thought of that, he straightway thought of his own transgressions which filled him with the horror of detection.

"Well, yes, we must take no responsibility on our shoulders," said the headconstable. So without loss of time the matter was brought to the notice of the

Deputy Collector. And next while preparations were being made to remove the senseless *daraga* in order to take him before that officer, a bottle was found near where he was lying. Ramesh picked it up. "It gives out a smell of liquor," said he, smelling the bottle. "Let me throw it away. What shall we do with it?"

"Do with it! Why, how foolish of you to say that! Let me see if there is any liquor in it."—"There's none," said Ramesh, turning the bottle upside down. But as he did so, a few blackish drops that were left, flowed out and trickled to the ground.

The headconstable was vexed. "What did you do that for?" cried he. "Why did you let those drops fall to the ground? You are a policeman and you could be so foolish as to do that? Give me the bottle, I say."

Ramesh's hand shook visibly as he

handed the bottle. "What makes you feel so nervous now?" said the headconstable, eying him from head to foot. "Oh," said Ramesh, moistening his lips with his tongue, "I feel so uneasy from having had to sit up all night last night." But his voice shook as he spoke, and the headconstable looked so as to let him plainly see that he was not at all satisfied with his explanation.

The *daraga* being brought in, he was laid down before the Deputy Collector, and the headconstable put the bottle by. After inspection, this officer *chalanned* the *daraga*, as also the bottle, to Krishnagar. He next appointed the headconstable to the task of investigating the other matter—the sinking of the boat in which two females belonging to Shashibhushan's house had made an attempt to escape.

Accordingly, the headconstable, accompanied by Romesh and two or three other

constables, proceeded to the quarter in which the boatmen lived. Then, with the boatmen whose boat had been hired, the police walked down to the river-side. They could get everything they wanted to know out of them, and then they ordered them to fish up the things which the females had taken with them. The boatmen were able to recover a few clothes of the females, but nothing more. For the cash-box they dived and dived long, but in vain. And when with the assistance of more men the boat was fished out, there was nothing found in it.

The headconstable next repaired to Shashibhushan's house to inquire as to how Pramada and her mother had succeeded in making their escape. He first inquired of Ramesh. How was he to know? He was at his post at the back-door, and he assured him that he never had left it for a minute. The headconstable then

saw Gadadhar's mother and said, "Who let you out of the house last night?"

"Why, the man who kept watch over my son-in-law's house," said she.

"His name?"

"It is a pretty name I should be sure. But, why, I mean the fellow who always pretended to be a very great friend of my son. The wretch tricked Gadadhar out of his money, and then had him sent off to *pulipolou*."

"Well, if you don't remember his name, you can point him out?"

"Of course I can."

"Well, madam, how did this man trick your son out of his money?"

"O friend policeman, in an evil hour did Gadadhar make friendship with this rogue of a constable. Every one knew how very simple my boy was. Would he ever have thought to intercept any registered letters if that fellow had never put

that into his head? At first the rogue had more than half of the misgotten money. But when after a time the matter came to be inquired into, he demanded of my son a hundred rupees more, and threatened to betray him into the hands of the police if he refused to pay it. I was so afraid for my son; for where was a poor woman like myself to get that sum of money? I am not, like my daughter, a rich man's wife, you know. However, I had some ornaments, and I said to my daughter, 'here, Pramada, keep these ornaments and let me have a hundred rupees.' Pramada is such a good dear, you know. To oblige her mother she kept the ornaments and let me have a hundred rupees to give to that fellow. And how did he repay it?" Pramada's mother was about to say how when, seeing Ramesh coming, she exclaimed, "Now, there comes the fellow." Ramesh had been off on some

errand, and as he came and stood by the side of the headconstable, she spoke to him, saying, "Constable, you, what's your name? But indeed it was very bad of you to give up my son after you had had nearly all the money."

"Who had had nearly all the money?" asked the headconstable.

Pramada's mother pointed to Ramesh.

"Who? What?" said Ramesh, pretending not to understand her.

"Why, weren't you at the bottom of that dirty affair?" said Pramada's mother.

"What dirty affair? I really don't understand what you mean, madam."

"Don't you, constable? I mean the intercepting of the registered letters in which you were implicated."

"I implicated in that dirty business! You are mistaken, I must say."

"Impossible," said Pramada's mother.

"Why, constable, I am not new to know

you. You used to call very frequently at our house, and you were thought to be very intimate with my son. But such blackguardism you were guilty of to him ! Do I not know that you last got a hundred rupees from my son ? And only last night you got from me Rs. 25/ as a bribe for letting us out of the house. Come, can you deny these facts ?”

Ramesh was unable to utter a word. “I see, I see,” cried the headconstable, and arrested him at once.

Nevertheless Ramesh said, “I am a policeman, sir. You shall regret it as sure as I live.”

In short Ramesh was *chalanned* to Krishnagar for trial.

After three whole days and nights the *daraga* regained his consciousness. He, it was thought, would have died without doubt but for the great care taken of him by the medical officer. However, when

he was in full possession of his senses again, being put on his trial before the District magistrate, he told the whole truth without concealing anything. The report also of the medical officer was that the liquor in the bottle was mixed with opium.

Ramdhan was arrested and sent up for trial. He, however, proved not guilty and was discharged. He could possibly have no motive in mixing up any poisonous drug with the liquor.

Now, who could have mixed opium with the liquor? While the police was busy endeavouring to trace out the culprit, a medical practitioner, living near Shashibhushan's house, declared before his neighbours that Ramesh had one day got from him four annas' worth of ladanum, saying that he was suffering from diarrhoea. This was brought to the notice of the police. The medical practitioner

was summoned to appear in the District Judge's court to give evidence. In court he told the plain truth that he had sold Ramesh four annas' worth of ladanum on his telling him that he was suffering from diarrhoea. The date, on which it had been sold, exactly tallying with the date, on which the *daraga* had lost his consciousness, Ramesh was convicted. Then he was tried for the other charges against him. His aiding and abetting Gadadhar to intercept the registered letters, his getting from him a greater part of the misgotten money as a bribe to make him hold his tongue about his offence, then his receiving a sum again from Pramada and her mother for his letting them out of the house, and lastly his mixing ladanum with the liquor meant for the *daraga*, which might have caused his death—these indeed were very grave charges, and these were completely proved against him.

The judge asked him if he had anything to say. Ramesh only hung down his head. The jury were unanimous in their verdict of guilty with regard to all the charges against him, and the judge sentenced him to transportation for life.

CHAPTER XLIV

MEETING OF SVARNA AND GOPAL

AT the Burdwan station in what agony did Gopal pass that night ! His sufferings no words could describe. How he wanted to get to next morning ! How very long the night seemed to him ! But it could not be night for ever, and at last it began to grow light. By and by the gray of the dawn gave way to a glowing sunrise, when the European station-master burst like another sun from his slumbers, and looked out of his chamber window. It was soon all bustle again at the station. In a little time the bell rang, and presently passengers were crowding at the open window of the Booking office for tickets. How they jostled and pushed one another. A few minutes passed, and then again a smart ringing of the bell indicated that the train was in sight. In three minutes

more in steamed the train. A number of passengers got out while the number on the platform got in. The train was to wait here for good ten minutes, and many left it either to take a turn on the platform or to buy sweets and fruits for themselves or for their children. But it was soon time again to start, the passengers had got in again, and the train began to move. Three more trains were in and out, and Gopal now awaited his release with the utmost impatience. It was near half past ten when at last he was let off after he had paid the fare.

At one o'clock Gopal took train again to come to Sreerampur. By the way his feelings, such as they were, might be conceived but not described. When the train reached the Sreerampur station, he got down in all haste and came away after delivering his ticket. He asked his way to the place where Shashanka lived.

What was his surprise when he found his house completely destroyed by fire. A great heap of ashes covered the site of Shashanka's house, and the police kept guard near it. Had Svarna desperately thrown away her life in the flames? In a moment, as the thought appeared very probable, his head was in a whirl; he staggered a few paces and then sank down on the pathway. A policeman passed by, but he had not the heart to ask him any questions. After a while he rose to his feet, and, picking up courage, approached the ashes. "What's the matter? What are you about here, sir?" he asked the *daraga*.

The *daraga* could see at a glance that he had a trouble on his mind. So he said, "The house caught fire last night, and the master of the house Shashanka Shekhar Smritigiri was burnt alive in it. We are in search of his body. Was he a relation of yours?"

"No, he was nobody to me," said Gopal in a sad tone. "But has any one else met the same fate here? Has any one committed suicide?" •

"Suicide? we have never heard of it. But why do you ask that?"

"Oh, my sister was here. Shashanka was going to marry her by force, and I was coming to deliver her from his hands. But unfortunately I fell asleep in the train. My sister wrote to tell me that if no one appeared for her rescue, she would commit suicide." When Gopal had said this he burst into tears.

"Oh, be not concerned for your sister," said the *daraga*. "Depend on it she is all safe now, for she escaped a little after the *chandimandav* had caught fire."

When Gopal heard that, so great was his excitement that his head was in a whirl again, and he felt as if he was about to fall down in a swoon. The

daraga was quick to see it. He made him sit down and paid particular attentions to him. After a while when Gopal was well, the *daraga* said, "Have you any disease?"

"No," said Gopal.

"You have taken your food?"

"No, I have had nothing to eat since last night," said Gopal.

The *daraga* at once sent for some *khobar*, but Gopal would not touch it when it was brought him. "Oh, I will have nothing to eat," said he, "until I have found my sister."

"But you need much first to take some refreshment, my friend."

Gopal was made to partake of the *khobar*, after which he rose, saying, "I thank you very much, sir. I want to inquire at every house, and I shall be much obliged if you will kindly let me take a constable with me."

"Most willingly," said the *daraga*. And he ordered a constable to go with Gopal.

Every house was visited, but in vain. Svarna was nowhere in the village, and not a scrap of information could he get about her. "Why, Svarna is no more," he said in extreme agony. Then having dismissed the constable he turned and walked on to the river-side. There he went and laid him down on the grass near the ferry.

Near where he lay, some boatmen came and stood disputing about something. "~~It's~~ a good real thing," said the one who spoke first. "Don't you mark its lustre?"

"Pooh!" said the man to whom especially these words were addressed. "I won't pay even a pice to have such a stone as this."

"Well, never mind the stone," said the third man. "We may be sure the gold of this ring will fetch something."

"Yes, if it is gold at all," observed the

second speaker. "Rich men's wives do not often wear gold ornaments."

"No," said the first speaker, "but our wives always do. Why, how people will laugh to hear you talk like that !"

"I don't care." said he. "But most people will foolishly take for gold anything that looks like gold, when they see it on a rich man's wife or daughter."

"Come, come, give it to me," said the one who owned the ring. "Gold or no gold, I mean to keep it."

"I do believe this ring is valuable," again remarked the one who spoke first. "But come, let us show it to that gentleman lying there. Let us see what he says."

The boatmen stepped up to Gopal. "Will you guess at the price, sir ?" said one of them, handing the ring.

When Gopal looked on the ring in his hand, he sat up with a start. His eyes shone with a new light, and he gasped,

"Where did you get it?" He knew at a glance that the ring had belonged to Svarna.

The boatmen looked hesitatingly at one another; then the man who owned the ring said, "Last night I rowed two women across. They got no money with them, and they gave me this ring instead."

When Gopal heard that, he sprang to his feet. "She lives, she lives," he murmured. Then he asked this boatman where those two women were gone.

"Gone to where a relation of Shashanka Thakur's maid-servant lives."

"The price of this ring," said Gopal "is not less than Rs. 30/-. I will pay Rs. 5/-, to any one of you who will see me to where those two women are gone."

"That I will, that I will," cried each one of the boatmen at once. But the one who had ferried Svarna over the river put himself before the rest and said, "I will

let none of you go, *I* will take the Babu over there. And didn't I row his wife across?" The boatman thought Gopal to be Svarna's husband.

Gopal went with this man. When he had crossed the river, he followed the boatman, who walked before to lead the way. "That hut up there," cried the boatman at last, pointing with his finger. Gopal paid what he had promised him. Then walking up, and catching from outside a glimpse of Svarna he stopped. "Svarna," he called out. But his excitement was too great, and before Svarna could come out to him, he fell down in a swoon.

CHAPTER XLV

CONCLUSION

WHEN Gopal recovered his consciousness, he found he was lying with his head supported on the lap of Svarna, who was fanning him gently. "How do you feel?" asked Svarna as Gopal opened his eyes.

"Where am I?" said Gopal.

"You are with me. I am Svarna. How do you feel?"

Gopal paused a little as if to collect his scattered thoughts. "Better," he said, and closed his eyes again.

A good quarter of an hour passed, and then Gopal opened his eyes again. "How do you feel now?" again asked Svarna.

Gopal slowly raised himself to a sitting posture. "I am all right now," he said; "but tell me, tell me all, Svarna, and how you came here."

"I will tell you by and by," she said, and left him immediately.

In a little time she returned to lead Gopal in to partake of the refreshment she had provided for him. She had long left off calling him *dada*. This Gopal had hitherto ascribed to his poverty ; but now he understood her heart, and he was happy.

"Now, tell me your story, Svarna," said Gopal, after he had partaken of the refreshment

Svarna began, and Gopal listened, interrupting her only with such impassioned exclamations from time to time as he could not refrain from uttering.

"Just retribution of Heaven!" he exclaimed when Svarna had ended. Gopal then told her his own story ; and Svarna freely shed tears when she knew all he had suffered on her account.

That night they could not get any sleep. Next morning Gopal went accompanied

by Svarna to the Barackpur station. When the train came in, he got into it with her, and reached the Sealdah station before 9 in the morning. •In half an hour more they were joined with Hem.

After this, weeks had passed away, and Hem had quite got back his former strength. Gopal now wore a bright and pleasant face. Hem had found out the secret of it. He, therefore, had resolved to make Svarna and Gopal happy by uniting their hands in marriage.

“ I wish to say something to you,” said Hem one day to Gopal with a smile.

“ Well, what, *dada* ?” asked Gopal.

“ Do you remember, Gopal, my having a talk with father last year about Svarna’s marriage ?”

“ Yes,” said Gopal.

“ Well, when father came to talk about it, you rose to leave the room. Do you remember that ?”

Gopal only nodded in the affirmative.

"Well, but father said," 'you may stay there, my boy.' I, however said you were rather dull and had better go and have a little walk. Now, can you guess why I said so?"

Gopal blushed and hung his head.

"Well," continued Hem, "because I wanted to propose Svarna's marriage with you. Father would have approved the match as in every way desirable, if only ~~you~~ had had competence. But if it did not please God to take him away suddenly, it wouldn't be difficult for me to conciliate him. Svarna's marriage, however, must not be delayed any longer, and I have made a point of giving her away in next month. I have found out you are in love with each other, and I am so glad of it. I must have you married. And I would want you to write to your father and ask him to come here soon."

Gopal was greatly moved by Hem's

words. He was going to thank him, but Hem said, "Hush, no thanks," and left him.

After this sometime had elapsed, and Svarna had become the wife of Gopal.

Shashibhushan was put upon his trial, but was discharged, because he had told the truth. The *amlas*, however, did not escape punishment.

The very house where Shashibhushan lived, and his lands and goods were all sold, and he now lived with his children at Gopal's house.

Though Pramada lived at her father's, Gopal had to pay for her maintenance. He would have asked her to come and live with him, but Shashibhushan was dead against it. Living at her father's Pramada was not on speaking terms with any one except her mother, with whom she talked at times.

Bidhubhushan now lived with his son in his native village. He had a prematurely

grey head and wrinkled brow, which made him look much older than Shashibhushan.

Gopal had recently got a son. Svarna had fondly given their child the name of Nepal, which well rhymed with the name of her husband.

Bidhubhushan so loved their child that he liked often to carry him about in his arms.

Syama had found a happy home in the house of her Gopal. The family gratefully remembered her services and meant to make her life as happy as they could.

Hem was always most welcome at Gopal's. They seemed to have one heart and one purse between them.

Bidhubhushan, wanting, if possible, to make Nilkamal, who had been his friend and companion abroad, happy, caused inquiries to be made about him in various places, but to his regret he heard nothing of him.

THE END

PRESS OPINIONS
 •
 OF
THE FIRST EDITION
 OF
BABU DAKSHINA CHARAN ROY'S
TRANSLATION OF "SVARNALATA."

" * * * Pleasantly written and easy to read. The *Englishman* will find here the Bengalee as he is with all his virtues and vices, and as an insight into the inner home of the Indian the book deserves to be carefully read. * * *
The Englishman.

" * * * The story is an accurate representation of Hindu domestic life in Bengal, and the translation, which is the work of DAKSHINA CHARAN ROY, aims at reproducing the spirit as well as the language of the original." *The Statesman.*

" * * * The story is an accurate representation of modern Hindu domestic life in Bengal—the unhappy life of a people who have lost the high ideal of the past, and who have fallen from this "high state," and have learnt to worship in the sanctuary of their hearts petty-self and Mammon. Babu Dakshina Charan has conferred a real boon on the English-reading public by presenting to them a faithful reading of the Bengali skit. * * * Brothers have given place to brothers-in-law in the modern Hindu household: they cannot tolerate the loving, faithful and devoted brother, but can be a toy to the whims and caprices of the worthy brother-in-law. The wife is now the dictator in the household, and the result is that the seed of dissension is sown only to reap the harvest

of disquietude. *Gadadhar Chander* is a familiar word—an expressive name. What a sad contrast is *Sarala* to *Pramada* ! The idea of a Hindu wife in the past is *Sarala* : and *Pramada* is a picture of a modern Hindu wife. The maid-servant Shama, again, is an embodiment of faithfulness. And compare the monster of a Shashanka with the guileless Sarna, * * * * Babu Dakshina Charan must be congratulated on having presented in elegant English the spirit of the original. * * * " *The Amritabazar Patrika*.

" * * * The foreigner will find in the pages of the translation much to instruct and amuse him. * ... * The simple and homely style the writer has adopted seems to us to be the most effective and appropriate." *The Bengalee*.

" * * * MR. ROY's object in making the translation is to give English people an idea of the inner life of the Hindus of Bengal. The tale, from this point of view, is well worth reading, for the narrative runs smoothly and freely, and the author sets his western brother (and sister) novelists a good example by never stopping to moralise. The translator gives a "glossary" for his English readers, which greatly helps them to enjoy the book. * * * " *The Madras Mail*.

"It is not often that a faithful picture of Indian life from the inside is available to the Englishman in India. But if "**Sarnalata**," of which a very readable English translation by MR. D. C. ROY is published by MESSRS. B. BANNERJEE & Co., Cornwallis Street, Calcutta, be a fairly representative work of vernacular fiction, the drawback is one for which the Englishman himself must be held to be partly responsible. The story is avowedly a picture of Hindu domestic life, and though the scenes and characters are those of Bengal, the sentiments, motives, and actuating ideas are common to Hindu life from the Himalayas to Cape Comorin. Herein lies a peculiarity of Hindu social life. Behind differences of language, and beyond differences of history, there is a common body of ideas and associations, which secures for the two hundred millions professing this ancient faith an underlying homogeneity where social and religious matters are concerned. The joint family living in harmony so long as the aged parents are alive, the introduction of dissensions subsequent to their death through the incompatibility of the two brothers' wives and

GLOSSARY

- Amla**, an officer in the employment of a Zamindar.
- Anchal**, the end of a *sari* which hangs loose down the shoulder.
- Andermahal**, the inner part of a house.
- Ashur**, a place fitted up for the reception of guests.
- Audhicari**, a head ; a proprietor.
- Bachha**, a child.
- Baitakhana**, a sitting room in the outer yard of a house.
- Balas**, bangles.
- Baroari-puja**, the *puja* performed by the people of a locality by raising subscriptions among themselves.
- Behala**, a violin.
- Burgis**, the Marhatta free-booters.
- Chadur**, a sheet.
- Chandan**, sandal paste.
- Chandimandav**, the house of the goddess Chandi or Durga.
- Chandrahar**, an ornament for the waist.
- Chapkan**, a loose outer garment.
- Cheli**, a silk *dhuti* or *sari*.
- Choitra**, the month commencing about the middle of March.
- Chowki**, a spacious wooden seat.
- Dada**, a term used by a brother or a sister in addressing an elder brother.
- Dadathakur**, a familiar term used by one of the sudra class in addressing a Brahmin.
- Daivakarjya**, the performance of a rite in which divine aid is sought for the fulfilment of a certain object in view.
- Dal**, pulse.
- Daraga**, an officer in charge of a police station.
- Dewan**, the chief officer in the service of a Zamindar.
- Dhole**, a kind of drum played with the fingers instead of sticks in a concert.
- Dhoom-dham**, show, pomp.
- Dhuli**, a drummer.
- Dhuti**, a piece of cloth with borders.

Didi, a term used by a brother or sister in addressing a sister who is older.

Falgon, the month commencing about the middle of February.

Galicha, a carpet.

Gamasta, one whose duty, under a Zamindar, is to collect rents.

Ganga-mrittika, the mud of the holy river, Ganges.

Ghati, a drinking vessel commonly made of bell-metal.

Gulmal, a noisy squabble ; an uproar.

Guru, a spiritual guide.

Gurumohashoy, a preceptor.

Hajat, a place where criminals are detained before being sent up for trial.

Handy, an earthen vessel for various purposes, esp. cooking.

Hanuman, the chief of the monkey heroes, who fought for Rama.

Hat, a country market held once or twice a week for the purposes of buying and selling.

Jajim, a costly sheet or chadur.

Jattra, the representation of a play without the help of a stage and scenes.

Jattra-walla, one who has a part to play in a jattra ; the head of a company of jattrawallas.

Java, a kind of flower commonly used in worshipping the Sakti. *Sakti* literally means force.

Kaka, a younger brother of a father.

Kakima, wife of a younger brother of a father.

Kalibari, the temple erected to the goddess Kali.

Kaloat, one eminently skilled in music.

Kerani, a clerk, a writer.

Khajanji, a chief accountant.

Khal, a canal.

Khatta, a preparation of something having a pungent acid taste.

Khirkhi, the back-door.

Khoka, a male child.

Khonpa, an artificial arrangement of hair at the back of the head.

Kulin, a high class Brahmin or a Sudra.

Kulsi, a pitcher.

Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth.

Lathi, a club.

Lota, a brass vessel.

Manihari, a seller of toys and other fine things.

Mantras, words used at a ceremonial observance or in worshipping a god or goddess.

Mem, a European lady.

Mohashoy, a word of address equivalent to Sir.

Mudi, a dealer in rice, pease, salt, sugar, etc.

Muhurigiri, the post of a muhuri or book-keeper.

Panchali, a kind of jatra representing in songs the amours or deeds of great characters in Hindu mythology.

Pandah, a pilgrim agent.

Pansi, a light boat with an awning usually moved by oars.

Pan-supari, pan, the leaves of the betel-pepper, and supari, the betel-nut or nut of the areca tree.

Pathshala, a school for little children.

Piadah, a peon.

Poita, the holy thread or the badge of honour worn by Brahmins and other high caste Hindus.

Pous, the month commencing about the middle of December.

Powa, the fourth part of a seer, one seer being equal to two and a half pounds.

Prajas, tenants.

Pratima, an idol.

Prosad, food distributed after it has been presented before a god or goddess.

Puja, worship paid to a god or goddess.

Pulipolou, meaning a convict settlement, such as the Andamans.

Rajputtra, son of a raja.

Rani, wife of a raja.

Sabha, an assembly.

Sadur, the usual entrance to a house.

Sala, an abusive term.

Samajmen, the Brahma missionaries.

Sandhya, morning or evening devotion.

Sarasvati, the goddess of learning.

Sari, a piece of cloth with broad borders.

Sisya, one personally initiated by his guru or spiritual guide.

Sundes, a kind of sweetmeat prepared from the mixture of curd and sugar.

Taktapos, a spacious wooden seat.

Thakrundidi, a grandam ; a female old enough to be a grandmother.

Thakur, a word of respect.

Thakurmohashoy, a spiritual guide.

Ustad, one eminently skilled in anything, a master.

Vadra, the month commencing about the middle of August.

Vagis, food dressed with oil in a pan over the fire.

Vasan, the immersion of a pratima or image into a river or tank.

Yoga, a favourable conjunction of certain planets observed by the Hindus as a highly auspicious time for the performance of such acts as bathing in the Ganges, giving alms to the poor, etc.

Yoma, the Indian pluto.

Zamindari shresta, the office of a Zamindar.

